THE SHORT STORY MAGAZINE

ARGOSY

JANUARY, 1957

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ARGOSY

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Log Book

OUR favourite Christmas legend used to be that one about the children who were minced up into hamburger by the wicked butcher and popped into the pickle-barrel, where they would have remained if they hadn't been rescued and reassembled by Saint Nicholas.

We'd always wondered if this story of the children and Saint Nick wasn't connected in some way with the origin of mince pies; however it seems this was a misconception, and research has now brought to light a more attractive theory. This alleges that they were originally *mint spies*, that is; government agents tracking down infringements of Ye Loterye Acte of 1485, which made it a penal offence to insert fardens, groates, or thripenyes into Christmas puddings.

The act, of course, later fell into desuetude and in due course the agents were known, almost affectionately, as mint humbugs, and were welcomed with tots of hot brandy and lighted candles. The phrase " There's always room for one more mint spy," instead of being a confession of greed, was in reality an indication of the esteem in which they were held.

Another misconception which we take this opportunity of correcting concerns Shakespeare's remark in *The Merchant of Venice*: " He hath an Argosy bound to Tripolis, another to the Indies . . . a third to Mexico." This statement was *not* made by Horatio, who comes into quite a different play and has nothing to do with our friend on page six; but of course it *does* refer to our overseas gift subscriptions; for details see inside cover.

H. E. Bates recently wrote an essay lamenting the famine in good new short-story writers, and suggesting that this was perhaps due to lack of poetic imagination in the young. Here is a challenge to would-be Argosy contributors!

Mr. Bates's own imagination is still racing in top gear, and The Times Literary Supplement recently pronounced his *Queen of Spain Fritillary*, which we printed last summer, one of his most effective works to date. His new story this month is in a very different and most robustious vein.

Mexican newspapers, we learn, often print news stories in verse for the edification of readers. Scanning the columns of the evening paper, you see this kind of item:

Abandoned by her lover
In grief that they should part
She fired her gun with deadly aim
And shot him through the heart.

We offer a two-guinea prize for the best four-line verse summarizing one of the stories in this issue. Entries, on a postcard, to The Editor, Argosy, The Fleetway House, London E.C.4, by January 10. Result of October Competition on page 39.

Paul Gallico, who contributes our moving and colourful Christmas story, is deeply familiar with the territory in which it is set, for he was born a New Yorker and knows all the surrounding countryside. Nowadays he lives in the minute principality of Liechtenstein and also has a house in Salcombe, Devon, where he spends his autumns bass-fishing.

Aubrey Menen was born in London in 1912; his father was Indian, his mother Irish, and he has spent a considerable part of his life in India, where he is a well-known radio personality. He has also been Director of the Experimental Theatre in London and dramatic critic to The Bookman. His books are a delicious mixture of Irish humour and exotic colour. They include *A Prevalence of Witches*, *The Duke of Gallodoro*, *The Backward Bride*.

John Salt is thirty-four, works in Fleet Street, is married, with two small children. His spare time is spent trying to coax plants to grow instead of weeds in a large, wild, wet garden, and trying *not* to sit down and write. Occasionally, however, he does give way to this temptation. His *Circle of Panic*, which we printed last year, is well on the way to being filmed.

Desmond Bagley is an engineer, has worked in the Rhodesian asbestos mines and Orange Free State goldfields. He now lives in South Africa and cultivates orange trees; he likes good food, quiet conversation, W. H. Auden, and watching the sun go down over a cold gin. He is engaged at present in the study of symbolic logic and the training of an Alsatian bitch.

John Ormerod was born in Lancashire in 1927. Serving in the Merchant Navy from 1943-47 he sailed three times round the world. He worked as a newspaper reporter for a year and then, he says, became a spiv, abandoning office life and writing eight three-act plays, none performed as yet. The main character in one of them was a chicken. He has had a one-act play, *That One Talent*, produced on BBC television.

JOHN SILVER

MY OLD MAN'S TRUMPET

Laughing, he swung it
right up to the stars

BY DESMOND BAGLEY

IT all started maybe three weeks ago. I keep a little music shop down in New Orleans. I don't do much business, just enough to keep the wolf from the door, but I couldn't be in any other work. I sell a few records and some sheet music, and condition a few instruments. I've got a good name for instruments; it's the one thing my old man taught me to do well, that and play a horn. I've conditioned instruments for some of the best. Johnny Dodds's clarinet, Fred Robinson's trombone, and once I did Satchmo's trumpet. I got a kick out of that.

Anyway, this day I was in the back room stripping a sugar stick, when I looked through my little spyhole and saw a white boy in the shop. He had my old man's trumpet in his hands and he was stroking it. I keep the trumpet over the glass case on the counter. It's by way of being my lucky piece.

I got up quickly and went into the shop. There wasn't many white folk came into my shop and those that did weren't up to much, and I didn't want one of that kind playing round with my old man's trumpet.

He was standing with his back to me and from the way he was standing I could tell he was pretty miserable. He was tall and rangy and I figured he was from Texas, where they breed them that way. I was going to walk up to him when he half turned and I saw his hands. He sure had a trumpet-player's hands with long fingers and he was cradling that trumpet like it was a new-born baby. His fingers played around with the pistons and his other hand stroked the horn. Back and forward it went, back and forward, stroking that horn.

Then he turned and saw me. His face was thin and he had the bluest eyes I've seen in a man. He smiled and it seemed as if the sun had broke from behind clouds. " Just admiring this trumpet," he said.

I said gently, " Sorry, but it's not for sale."

He looked at it and sighed. " It's a good instrument," he said.

I knew it was a good horn and I knew he must know something about music. " That was my father's," I said; " I wouldn't want to sell that." I paused. " I've got a couple in the back room to sell, if you want one."

He looked at me. " But not as good as this."

" No," I said, " Not as good as that one."

His hands tightened round it a little and then relaxed. He put it back on top of the glass case and stepped back, still looking at it. " That's one of the best I've seen," he said.

" It's pretty good," I said. I thought a little. " Look," I said, " I don't let *anybody* play that horn. I play it myself every Saturday night. Me and a few of the boys have a session. Louis Armstrong played that horn, too, when he was in New Orleans. We really went to town that time." I paused again. " You can play it if you want to."

He was still looking at the horn, but he made no move to reach for it. He shook his head regretfully. " No," he said in a kind of sad voice, " I'd better not." Then he said, " Thank you," and was gone out of the shop.

I went to the door and looked up and down the street, but he was nowhere to be seen.

That was the first time I saw him.

In the next few days I saw him pretty often in the street. He must have been rooming nearby, which is pretty unusual for a white boy. He seemed to know his way around, too. He went for the music and knew enough to stay away from the tourist joints. He wanted music, my kind of music, and he knew he wouldn't get it at the high-falutin places. They have written band parts there.

No—he stuck to the dives where they play for fun, not for a living, and he heard it hot and sweet and from the heart.

I didn't speak to him because I figured he'd come in to the shop. He *had* to come to the shop. Anyone who handled a horn the way he had had to come back; he couldn't stay away.

He came in four days later, so silently that he was standing in front of the glass case before I knew he was there. He looked at the horn a space, then looked at me, and said, " Still not for sale?" He was smiling.

" No, son," I said, " still not for sale. I'm sorry." And I was sorry. He wanted it so bad. But I couldn't sell my old man's trumpet. It wasn't in me.

He reached up and took it down. His fingers wrapped themselves automatically round the pistons.

" You can play it," I said.

He looked at me with a strange expression. Then he said, " I'd better not. I'm not allowed to."

" Oh," I said. I had him figured. " You must be like my old man. A doc warned him against it. Lung trouble."

The white boy said, " Did he stop playing? "

I shook my head. " No, he went right ahead. He couldn't not play the horn." I paused. " It killed him in the end."

" I'm sorry," the white boy said.

I said, " I don't think he was. He'd rather have been dead than not play. He could have gone on to a clarinet, but he couldn't leave the horn."

" It's hard," he said. He put the horn back on to the glass case and walked out of the shop.

So that was it. A horn-player who wasn't allowed to play, but couldn't resist the chance of handling a good instrument. I felt sorry for the kid.

He was in again next day, looking at the horn. I left him alone for a while—I was busy assembling the sugar stick in the back room. After a while I went into the shop. He was standing with the trumpet in his hands, his fingers slowly pumping the pistons and his other hand gently stroking the bell of the horn, back and forward, back and forward. His eyes were closed. It gave me the willies.

I said, " Look, it's none of my business, son, but why rile yourself? If you ain't allowed to play it, leave it alone."

He opened his eyes and looked at me with a blank stare. " It's such a long time since I've played," he said softly, almost to himself. The way he said it made it seem an awful long time, which was funny because he was only a kid, not more than twenty-three, twenty-four.

Then he seemed to come out of his trance. " What did you say? " he asked.

I skipped it. " Can you play the clarinet? " I said.

He seemed doubtful. " I don't know," he said, " I think it would be all right."

" What did the doctor say? "

He looked at me. " What? " he said.

" The guy who said you hadn't to blow a trumpet. Did he say anything about a clarinet? "

He smiled thoughtfully. " No," he said, " There wasn't anything said about a clarinet."

" I've just assembled one in the back room. Like to try it out ? "

He smiled. The world lit up. That boy had a nice smile. " I sure would," he said.

I went and got the sugar stick. When I got back I saw he had put the trumpet back in its place. I grinned to myself. I figured that what he wanted was something to take his mind off the horn. A clarinet might do it. I gave it to him.

He took it from me as though he was doubtful of something. Maybe he wondered if he could still play. But it couldn't have been long since he had played. He was only a kid.

His hands set themselves on the keys and he raised it to his lips very slowly. He licked his lips and seemed almost afraid. And then he seemed to stiffen and he blew a riff. It was hot and I knew I had found me a player. I mean a *player*. A *real* player.

He had played the riff and stopped. He was holding his head on one side as if he was listening for something. Then he went to the door and looked up and down the street.

I said, " What's the matter? "

He turned, and there was such a look of joy on his face as I've never seen on any man before. Joy seemed to spread all round him and suddenly I was feeling pretty good myself. Then he raised the sugar stick to his lips and started to play.

I've heard the clarinet played by some good boys. I've heard Johnny Dodds and Jimmy Strong. But I've never heard it played like this white boy played it. He took it low and he took it high and all the time so sweet. He had the Dixie beat so true that he must have been born in the South. I disremember what he played except that he ended with the *Empty Bed Blues*, and I'll remember that for ever. He dragged that blues from his heart and pushed it through the sugar stick and it sounded like all the troubles of the South since before slavery. I was nearly crying when he finished. Me crying!

And then I saw the shop was full.

Folk had come in from the street and were standing round looking at this white boy. They didn't clap or shout when he'd finished, but there was a sort of sigh like a sudden wind on the river in the morning. No one spoke to him. Some smiled at him as they went out and pretty soon the shop was empty again. I reckon that nobody wanted to break the spell he'd cast on them. They all wanted to keep what he'd given them as long as they could.

And what had he given them? I don't know. I've thought about it long and often and I reckon he'd given the soul back to my own people. Living in a white man's country isn't fun for a negro, and I reckon that when he played my folk's music better than we could, he had shown us that life isn't all kicks, and there's some things we can do together. But I don't know. I'm not clever enough to figure it out.

He was standing with the clarinet in his hands. " I can play! " he said.

" You can play," I said flatly; then I woke up. " My God, you *càn* play! With that clarinet you can play in any name band in the States. What the hell are you doing fooling around here? "

He said, half to himself, " It's not as good as a trumpet." He said it regretfully.

I said unbelievingly, " Do you mean you can play the horn better than that clarinet? "

He didn't answer. He was looking at my old man's trumpet on the glass case.

" Look," I said, " my name's Williams. Joe Williams. Folks call me Fatso." I grinned and slapped my belly. " But that's where the trumpet wind comes from."

He looked at me. " My name's—er—call me Jake," he said, and stuck out his hand.

That night Smiley Jones came to see me. " Hear you had a shindig at the shop this afternoon," he said.

" Smiley," I said, " I've got hold of a boy who can play the clarinet. I mean *play*."

" A white boy," Smiley said. Smiley had some trouble in his life. He had no time for white folk. But this was different.

I said, " Look, Smiley, I want you and the boys to do me a favour. Tomorrow we have a session. I want the white boy to come."

" What kind of a white boy is that who'll dig with us shines? " said Smiley. He wasn't asking a question. He didn't want to know. He was just being down on the whites.

" Just hear him, Smiley," I begged. " Just you hear him."

After a lot of arguing, Smiley saw reason or, at least, he agreed that Jake should come with us. But I could see that it was against his nature and he was going to take Jake on his merits, not on my word. Which was a good thing, anyway.

Jake came to the shop next morning. Like all the times he came I never saw him come in. One minute he wasn't there and the next minute he'd be standing in front of the glass case looking at my old man's trumpet.

I said, " Look, Jake, how'd you like to play in a session? "

His face lit up. " I sure would," he said. Then he frowned. " Think I'm good enough for you boys? " he asked.

I swallowed. " You'll do," I said.

He lifted down the trumpet and fingered the pistons. " Tell me about your old man," he said, " I'd like to meet him."

I stared at him. " But I told you my old man was dead," I said.

He was confused. He said, " I mean I'd have liked to meet him."

" He died in '34," I said, " when I was sixteen. He was a good man, never harmed a soul." I leaned on the counter. " He was on the river boats in 1917. A feller who came down from New York said that was the golden age of Dixieland jazz. He said that jazz was made on the river boats. Well, my dad must have helped make it. He was a good horn-player, although he never made a name for himself like some of the others. But he could blow it sweet and true, and hot and true, and hold his own in any jam."

Jake said, " How did he die, Fatso? "

I said, " It was like this. In '28 he was up in St. Louis playing in a honky-tonk. He used to get these pains in his chest so he went to the Doc. The Doc asked what he did for a living. My old man said, ' Trumpet-player.' The Doc said, ' That's out.'

" It nearly finished my old man. He'd been playing all his life. He couldn't stop now. Trumpet-playing was too great a strain on the lungs and the heart. He could play a clarinet but not a trumpet. But he didn't. He figured that he'd rather play the trumpet. I remember the night. He suddenly got up from his chair and took the trumpet and played solid for three hours. Celebrating his decision. That was in '31.

" I think maybe I was the reason he started playing again. It was the depression. Jobs were scarce, but he could always pick up a few dollars with the horn.

" His chest got worse, but he carried on. It was New Year's Day, '34, that it happened. We were here in New Orleans. New Year's Day is a great day here. Everyone celebrates and there's parties all over the place. A good horn-player can really dig in at New Year. But Pa collapsed just after midnight. Just in '34. He was fifty-six."

Jake didn't say anything for a while. He just looked at the horn, stroking it with his hand, back and forward, back and forward. Then he said, " That was tough."

I said, " You'd better keep off the horn or maybe you'll end the same way."

He looked surprised. " How? "

" You'll die," I said.

" Oh, that! " he said indifferently.

He put the trumpet back on top of the glass case. " It would be worse trouble than dying," he said.

Shortly after that he went, leaving me to figure out what there was in playing a trumpet worse than dying.

That evening we picked up Jake. There were six altogether

in my brother's car. Jake, my brother Jim, Smiley, Bill Patley, Little Joe, and me. We used to go up the river quite a piece, maybe fifty or sixty miles, find a quiet place, and get in the groove. It was real nice on those moonlight nights and we always had a few beers to help us along.

We parked the car and I got out the crate of beer and helped Little Joe set up his drums. It was cool on the river after the day and the moon was shining down through a few little clouds.

Smiley opened a beer and had a swallow, then set up his clarinet. I had brought another one for Jake, a real good instrument that a bum had hocked with me. Little Joe set up a rhythm on his trap and Bill joined in softly with his banjo.

I said, " Let's go," and swung into *Fireworks* with my old man's trumpet. Jim and Smiley followed in turn on trombone and clarinet. Jake didn't play. He just sat watching and listening with the sugar stick held loosely between his fingers. When we finished he said to Smiley, " You played that real good."

Smiley didn't say anything. He just looked at Jake and went and got himself another beer.

I signalled to Little Joe and he swung in on the drums and I followed into *Sugarfoot Strut* good and hot. I finished a riff and waved Jake in. As he played the first notes I heard Smiley give a sharp hiss as though the breath had been driven out of his body.

I looked at him. He was sitting there with the beer forgotten in his hand, and his eyes were wide.

Jake went crazy with that clarinet. The notes rang as clear as a bell over the water beneath the moon. He played it hot and he played it sweet, but mostly hot, and he did things with that sugar stick that I didn't think could be done.

Then he waved Smiley in and they played together. It was really in the groove, one following the other easily and effortlessly. We had something here that players from written music won't never have. I've never heard Smiley play so well, but he couldn't touch Jake.

We all joined in and it was real music. When we finished, Smiley went over to Jake and stuck out his hand. " You're good," he said.

Jake took his hand and grinned. " You're not so bad yourself."

After that we all had us a beer. We needed it. The boys were excited and everyone was happy. Jake said, " This is the music."

I said, " The best there is." After a while I said, " You remember me saying about a feller from New York? "

Jake said " Yes."

" He said something about Dixieland jazz. He said, ' You fellers down here are the cognoscenti of this music.' I didn't

know what he meant, so I just said, ' I reckon we are.' I looked it up in a dictionary after he'd gone."

Smiley said, " What did it mean? "

I said, " It means that we're the fellers in the know about music."

" Yes," said Jake, " I reckon you are."

That was the first session we had with Jake. We had three sessions altogether.

The second session was like the first, only everyone was happy right from the start. Smiley had seen Jake two or three times during the week. They were real friendly now.

Jake had been in the shop every day. Every day he came in and took down the horn and stroked it, and him and me would talk about music and players. He knew a lot about it, did that boy.

We went to the same place. Going in the car, Little Joe said, " Say, Jake, don't you work at anything? "

Jake said, " Sure do, but I'm on a vacation."

" What do you do? " Smiley said.

Jake didn't answer for a minute, then he said in a soft voice, " I'm a trumpet-player."

Nobody spoke, because I'd told them all about Jake and trumpets and not being allowed to play. Everybody shut up because somebody had said the wrong thing.

The week after, Jake came in to the shop every day. He just couldn't keep away from that horn. His attitude was funny. He loved it and seemed afraid of it, all at the same time. I had watched my old man and I knew just what was eating Jake.

Once I caught him just raising the mouthpiece to his lips. He saw me looking at him and grinned sheepishly. " Just wanted to get the feel of it," he said.

I took the horn from his hands and put it back on the glass case. I said, " Now look here, son. Quit worrying about the horn. If you can't play, you can't play, and that's an end to it." I paused and looked at him. " Got a girl? "

He shook his head.

I sighed and said, " Let's go into the back room. I've got a good collection of waxings."

So we went into the back room and played records. He was taken by one of Louis Armstrong with Lil's Hot Shots. Armstrong on the trumpet, Kid Ory on trombone, Johnny Dodds on clarinet, Lil Hardin Armstrong on piano and Johnny St. Cyr on banjo. It was *Georgia Bo Bo*. When it was finished he sighed. " That Armstrong sure can play," he said.

I said, " Jake, isn't there a chance you'll play again? "

He smiled. That wonderful smile. " Sure, I'll play again.

But I don't know when." The smile went off his face. " It's so long since I played."

I said, " Well, there's a chance. It may not be more than five years. You'll still be young." He laughed outright. He bent over double, laughing. He couldn't stop laughing.

I didn't get it. I didn't see what I said was funny.

Come Saturday night we all piled into Jim's car and went up-river again. The last session we'd run short of beer, so I'd brought two crates this time. With us six in the car and the beer and the instruments, we were a tight fit. The drums were worst. We always used to kid Little Joe that a little guy like him should have stuck to the piccolo.

But we got there all right and pulled out the drums and the beer, and after I'd helped Joe set up the drums I sat on the river bank watching the water. Little Joe was strumming gently on the trap, and Jake picked up the clarinet and played something so soft and low you couldn't hear it. It was torchy and blue. It had sorrow in it and anger, and a queer kind of longing.

I picked up my old man's trumpet and broke in, switching from minor to major, and loud. He looked at me, his eyes glinting in the moonlight, and suddenly he laughed and, lifting his clarinet, swung it right up to the stars.

It was the same melody, but the mood had changed. Before it was sorrow; now it was joy and triumph. Smiley joined in, and we went to town. I was playing as if I was inspired. I know what Smiley must have felt like when he played with Jake the first time. I couldn't go wrong. The riffs came smoothly and the notes true. I felt my heart lift right up to that old moon.

Then we had finished. " Zowie," Smiley said, his chest heaving and the sweat shining on his forehead. " That's music! "

We broke open the beer and then we played again. What we played I don't know. Jake was improvising as he went along, and we followed him. Yes, we followed him all the way. We played torchy and we played blue. We played it hot and we played it sweet. We played that jazz every way it could be played. The sound of it went echoing over the water and the night wore on and the moon drifted across the sky and still we played on and on.

Then I looked at my watch and it was midnight. I put the horn down and went and opened a beer. It tasted good; cold and good. Then I looked at them. They were drunk, all of them. Not on beer, but on music, on Dixieland jazz.

Then I saw Jake lift up my old man's trumpet. I thought quickly. I had come to like this kid. If he hadn't been white he could have been my own son. I knew he shouldn't play the

trumpet and I remembered what had happened to my old man.

I can see Jake now. He lifted that horn to his lips. He was standing with his legs straddled and knees bent and he stooped to the horn. And started to blow.

He blew a note right from the ground floor, right in the bass. I hadn't known that horn could get so low. And he lifted it in a smooth curve of sound right to the moon. Higher and higher. It was the beginning of a riff to end all riffs.

He was standing there, looking at the sky, but with his eyes closed, pouring all his soul into that horn. And it was still going higher and higher.

I jumped over and slapped the horn out of his hands. He let it go and just stood there, looking at the sky with his eyes closed. As if he were looking at something in his own head.

And then the sun rose. In the *north.* It shone on Jake and got brighter and brighter until it was day. And he was looking at that sky right inside his own head. And it got brighter and brighter, this sun in the north, until you couldn't see. Then I figured what it was. The atom plant, a hundred miles clear up river, had blown itself to hell. The sound came, like thunder, like the anger of God, and the wind and sudden clouds and dust.

I saw the car pitch over into the river and I saw Jake standing there like a man in a trance. Then I didn't see anything more.

I was in hospital quite a time. They brought me my old man's trumpet. It's a bit battered but it'll play. And they tell me that Smiley and Jim, my brother, and Bill Patley and Little Joe are all dead. They found their bodies.

But they didn't find Jake's body.

I reckon he knew he'd done a bad thing. But he had to play the horn. It was such a long time since he played it. I don't think he'll be punished much, for the Lord is an understanding and merciful judge. I guess that by the state of this little old world he'll be called on to play the trumpet again pretty soon.

I sometimes wonder what would have happened if I hadn't knocked the trumpet out of his hands.

I keep my old man's trumpet by my bed and polish it every now and then. Some good boys have played that horn . . . my father and Louis Armstrong.

But the best of them all was Gabriel himself, the Trumpeter of the Lord.

★ ★ ★

PORKY HUMOUR?

Definition of a hot dog: it feeds the hand that bites it.

MISS RIVER

She would never dare to ask
who owed her for that pound of tomatoes

BY NICHOLAS DEE

OSIE WAINWRIGHT was waiting for Stan, had been for sixteen years. Ever since their wedding morning, in fact, when the nuptial motor bike, carrying them off to a Blackpool honeymoon, had skidded, lurched, and smashed into a wall. Stan was thrown clear with nothing but a bruise or two; Osie woke up to find herself in hospital, one side of her face bandaged up, and the nurses uncommonly kind and solicitous.

"Miss River," some of the neighbours still called her, but not to her face. If she heard it the scar whitened, and her lips went firm and thin, and she looked away slantingly over their shoulders to the mud-coloured river and the willows and playing-fields on the opposite shore where the coal barges slumped and waggled.

There had been enough left from the various beauty-contest winnings to buy her junk-and-bookshop, and it was not a bad place, specially in summer when she dumped all the chairs outside in the dust, and the overflow customers from The Anglers could, if they liked, bring their mild-and-bitter and sit gossiping in the shade of her grape-vine and looking at their faces in her tarnished mirrors.

Osie herself never drank till the evening; during the day she always slopped around at home in her patched corduroys, felt slippers, each held on by an elastic band, and a man's sweater with *AFS* stencilled on the back. She had a basement full of books, and there she often sat and read for hours, frowning away to herself with fierce concentration whether over Old Moore or Gibbon's *Decline and Fall.*

In the evenings, after a whisky or two, she would open up a bit. Some of the neighbours had been shown the yellowing stack of newspaper clippings.

"That's when I won the Eel Pie Island competition—bit of nonsense that was, of course, really; still, it was good fun. That's when I was Miss Southend, in the gala; eighteen I was then, I've still got the costume somewhere if the moths haven't had it, sort of powder-blue it was."

They seldom reached the bottom of the sheaf. Osie's mouth would begin to tighten when she came to the picture of her as Miss Reading with her fiancé, Mr. Stanley Mansell, the well-known band leader, and she'd chuck the whole lot back into the kitchen-table drawer.

" Don't know why I don't get rid of the whole perishing lot. Let's get out of here and go down to The Anglers."

Stanley would have had a poor welcome if he had ever appeared in the evening when she came slouching home from The Anglers. One of the objects in the junk-shop was a slender, whippy, bone camel-goad, and this she would at times pick up and run lovingly through her fingers, thinking how she would like to have one or two good slashes at Stanley with it—not more, she was a reasonable woman—just to show him what she had been feeling about him all these years.

In the daytime she was not so bitter. You can't blame him, after all, she often thought, looking up fumblingly from the blurred green page of Macaulay, or whatever had taken her fancy. It's no use kidding myself he was marrying me for my mind, or my beautiful nature, poor old Stan. Come to that I was doing quite well for myself. Multiple beauty-contest-winner to marry well-known band leader, Miss River to become Mrs. Mancowski, it would have gone nicely.

But he might have shown up just once, just to explain it was all off, I'd have understood that. Who was steering the goddam bike, after all?

She had not even heard his name for years, not since the unsavoury case when he and Weidenheimer, the promoter, had both been gaoled for two-year terms. But she knew that some day, sooner or later, he would turn up again, would be glad to avail himself of the squalid, friendly, riverside comfort of the junk-shop, and the neighbourliness of Plantagenet Row.

Tommy Bowling, Dave Matthews, Peter Drake, the most frequent habitués of her grape-vine, sometimes teased her, but not unkindly: " You'll look silly if he comes along one night and you throw him in the river before you stop to think. Why don't you take on someone your own weight? I'm ready for a spot of bigamy whenever you say the word—why not take me on?" And when she pretended to throw a chipped china wash-basin, whichever of them it was would take himself grinning out of arm's reach.

Osie had always refused to divorce Stan. She knew that men still admired her splendid body; marriage and her shaggy clothes were her protections against encroachment. Her jokes were as ribald as those of any of the customers at The Anglers, and it was

possible that among these only Dave, Tommy, and Peter, her nearest neighbours, suspected the hostile and raging virginity within her.

Sometimes she knitted for Stan. She had a whole drawerful of sweaters ready for him, socks, scarves, and gloves; his petulant smiling face coldly watched her from above the chiffonier as she sat clicking away on green summer mornings before anybody in the Row was up. The rivery light would come in the windows and smooth itself round the food always standing on the tables of the back room which was kitchen and parlour combined: plates of tomatoes and cress, bottles of ketchup and milk, bottles containing a dreg of whisky that wanted finishing up. Lately Osie had been feeling low and disinclined to eat; she would make a pie and then take against the look of it and carry it next door to Peter, who was a widower and mostly lived on bacon, tea, and jam; he and his lean cat Blackie were always glad to see her.

"You oughtn't to do it, Osie, though. You need feeding up yourself, doesn't she, Dave?" Peter called across the two fences to Dave on the other side, who was pottering among the jam jars by his backdoor, looking to see if Betty the duck had laid an egg in her dish pan.

"No use reasoning with women this time of year," Dave yelled back, straightening with an effort, egg in hand. "She'll work it out of her, when August Bank Holiday's come and gone. Summer's a tricky time for the female system."

It was Peter's birthday they'd all been celebrating that Saturday night, with the old songs, the old favourites, under the lamplit leaves of the grape-vine and The Anglers' apple trees. The sore spot in Osie's mind had been soothed by the warmth of the whisky; Stan was forgotten along with Monday, the gas bill, tight shoes, frost, and old age.

Her bed in the front room received her kindly. She hadn't bothered to light the paraffin lamp; just kicked off her clothes and sneakers and flopped on top of the sheets, lying naked for the heat with her arms above her head, looking up from the shadows into the stippled lamplight on the ceiling. They were still singing somewhere along the road, and she drifted into sleep among lovely roses and dear old pals.

She woke in profound astonishment a few seconds or hours later when a male body climbed uncertainly into her bed and a husky voice commented, "Pete's sake, what's got into the bed this time?" A hand moved doubtfully up her neck and jawline, tangled and untangled her hair and then, more decisively, gripped her arm above the elbow.

"That's real, that is," the voice muttered.

Osie found none of it real; the whole episode seemed to her the essence of dream. She had not imagined that a man's skin would be so smooth, that his shape would dovetail into hers so conveniently. She lay with her head on a supporting shoulder and smiled up in puzzled gratitude at the flitting, swinging stars overhead in the plane branches. She made no comments and asked no questions.

Later the moon shouldered up, casting a cold, sceptical light across the room, and Osie, out of the depths of sleep, heard a stumbling and cursing as her visitor helped himself to a drink of water from the jug and bumped into a tea-chest. She turned over, sighing, and forgot him; next morning there was no sign of his presence but a drying pool of spilt water on the floor, and an empty bowl that had held a pound of tomatoes.

Osie eyed this reflectively.

Which of 'em was it, she wondered.

She felt no indignation that her long-preserved virginity had been taken, along with a pound of tomatoes and a drink of cold water; here, as in all her other dealings, her attitude was one of common sense.

Can't be helped, she thought, no use making a fuss now. But I'd like to know which of 'em it was. She looked with an odd kindness at her neighbours that hot morning, trying to surprise in one of them a look of complicity or rueful acknowledgment, but they gave her deceptively simple smiles. They had been talking at the end of the road before breakfast.

For a moment she wondered if it could have been some stranger blundering into her house in the puzzling night; and then she realized that this was her friends' tact; they were trying to bury the whole matter as they thought she would wish.

Her heart warmed to them, the silly chaps; did they think she was going to bite them? She hummed a bit of a song to herself and went off, on an impulse, down to the shops that afternoon to buy a couple of cotton dresses; couldn't wear trousers all summer if it was going to be as hot as this, and she had looked her best in blue once.

Dropping June roses in the gardens smelt sweet, and dogs smiled, panting in the dust; the wide river cut a great swathe of light in the milky air of evening.

When she came laden home there was a telegram lying on the mat; a bruised and battered orange envelope, it had tracked her down from one past address to another and lay, thin and forlorn, scribbled over and over with redirections.

Osie knew what would be in it as she tore the envelope apart.

Your husband dangerously ill please come at once Melbury District Hospital.

She had no idea where Melbury was, and stood dazedly for a moment staring at the skeleton letters until she remembered the old ABC timetable somewhere in the basement.

" He can't die, he won't *die*," she was muttering as she moved piles of books, almost at random, using an aged atlas as a shovel. The ABC toppled out from a collapsing heap and she left the disorder and returned to the green dusk in the porch. Her eyes trailed up and down the columns like sleepwalkers until she found the place she wanted, which told her that she had three-quarters of an hour in which to get to the London terminus; and then she went upstairs, found the rucksack she'd used for her honeymoon, and thrust into it the last sweater and socks to be completed, a pot of jam, a couple of books (Volume Ten of Allison's *Europe* and the *Amateur Gardener*) and a hot-water bottle lacking a stopper. She left the house, pulling the door to casually behind her.

Tears were pouring down her cheeks, but she took no notice of *them*.

Like a drunk man walking a tightrope, Osie caught all her train connections by inches, not noticing the huge gaps that lurked on either side, the cavernous hours that would have yawned had she turned left instead of right or paused to buy an evening paper. Hunger and sleep passed her by, and the yards of night reeled away behind.

The first journey to a hospital is astronomically swift; it is on the last journey away from a hospital that the plan of every back-yard along the road is printed on the memory.

" Your husband's in the last bay along at the end of the ward," a young, small nurse told her, " but you're to see Sister first."

The Sister had reddish hair and a pale, beautiful complexion; her uniform might have been designed as a garnish for her and she looked like the lovely artificial dishes put out for display in restaurant windows.

" It took you a long time to get here," she remarked, with-drawn, antagonistic. " Now, please understand: your husband is very ill, he is going to die. It's important that he shouldn't know or he will get upset and work himself up. Please do your best for us."

Osie nodded, scared, towering over the diminutive, aristocratic Sister, the rucksack swinging untidily from her elbow.

" All right, you can go along now. Nurse, show her."

The ward was quiet, lapped in pools of shadow, faint light here and there picking up the gleam of a white counterpane. Breath-ing and sighs came from every part.

A little oasis of light encircled Stan's bed behind the screens and there he lay, propped on pillows, gaunt, motionless, monolithic.

At first she thought he was asleep or dead, and then he turned a little, moved his eyes, saw her, and smiled.

"Hullo, dear."

"Oh Stan," Osie said, "they've taken your teeth out."

"I had 'em done myself," he said. "Too much trouble with 'em." He spoke a bit indistinctly, though she could understand him.

She wanted to cry at the sight of his poor hatchet-face but held back the tears.

"I brought you a sweater and some odds and ends," she said.

"That was nice of you, dear." His eyes travelled incuriously down to the rucksack as she pulled the things out, and she felt ashamed of them and bundled them unceremoniously into his locker. A look of weariness or impatience came over his face, and then he saw the sweater and said, "That's nice. Let's have it on. I feel the cold."

She gave it to him but saw at once that he was too weak to put it on for himself and so carefully, anxiously, helped him on with it, smoothing the thick soft wool over his protruding bones, lifting his heavy, inelastic weight.

"Is it nice here?" she asked.

"No, it's not," Stan said violently. "Half the time they don't know what they're doing. I wish I could get out of here. Could you get me out, Osie? If they knew I'd somewhere to go they'd let me out. Where are you living now?"

"I've got an old dump of a shop by the river, not a bad place," Osie said cautiously. "You can come and live there as soon as you're fit to be moved."

"Can I? That'd be great. I could do with a bit of your cooking, Osie, not that I eat anything much these days."

"You're thin," she agreed, taking his hand. It was nothing but bone.

He held hers tightly and muttered, "Do, do get me out of here, Osie. I can't stand it much longer. Please do. I do love you, you know that, I always did. It wasn't my fault about—you know. I'll tell you about it when I'm not so tired."

She nodded, and they were quiet for a minute or two while she gently and carefully stroked his hand.

"What have you been doing all these years, Osie?" he said presently.

"Oh, one thing and another. I've got some good friends."

"Ever thought of marrying again?"

" No, I never have," she said and then suddenly, powerfully, the recollection of last night came back to her, and of the happy, friendly mood that had carried her along all through the day. It was like a tide turning back and meeting itself, her thoughts tossed to and fro like spars. No time to go into all that now, though.

" You were so pretty," he said sleepily. " Prettiest girl I've ever seen. We had some good times together."

" So we will again," Osie said stoutly. She stooped and kissed him. " You go to sleep now. Back in the morning."

Sister was writing away in her office and looked put out by this second interruption.

" Can you tell me—" Osie began, and then tried again: " How long will my husband— Should I stay down here tonight? "

" That's entirely for you to decide," Sister said impassively, smoothing down the gold chain that dangled against her white starched bib. " If you care to ring up later we'll tell you how your husband is."

There was an agricultural conference going on in the town and all the hotels were full. Osie couldn't get a bed anywhere. In the end she went back to the station, as it was now past one in the morning, and the night staff there said she could sleep in the ladies' waiting-room if she didn't mind being locked in. Osie had no objection to this, she was asleep on the wide leather seat before they had locked the door, although she woke later in the night, cold and thirsty.

At six, when the milk train clanked off to London, she went shivering out into the station yard and telephoned the hospital.

" Mrs. Mansell? I am sorry to tell you that your husband died this morning at half past three."

" He died? " Osie stared incredulously at the black mouthpiece.

" If you like to come along here at about ten you can sign the necessary forms and collect his things."

When Osie arrived home that evening her friends had been in and left the house ready for her. There was a bought meat pie on the table, and a jam jar full of nasturtiums. A kettle simmered, ready to make tea. Mrs. Wilcox at The Anglers had told them the news.

While Osie was still standing and looking at the table, Dave came in with two eggs from Betty the duck.

" Thought you might like an egg with your tea, Osie," he said gently. " Do you good after a journey."

Behind his shoulders appeared the anxious faces of Peter and Tommy. Osie sat down exhaustedly, her legs stiff as boards under her, and Dave made the tea, slopping it in clumsy haste.

" There you are, that's what you need," said Peter with relief, and she drank, staring down at the table, anywhere but at the faces of her friends, because she was beginning to think that she would now never dare to ask which of them owed her for that pound of tomatoes.

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 144

Across. 1, *Industrial.* 6, *Carp.* 10, *Earnest.* 11, *Teasing.* 12, *Aryan.* 13, *Eglantine.* 14, *Drown.* 16, *Topically.* 18, *Oak-apples.* 19, *Elves.* 21, *Albatross.* 24, *Pilot.* 25, *Incised.* 26, *Oatmeal.* 27, *Elsa.* 28, *Freebooter.*

Down. 1, *Ireland.* 2, *Dirty work.* 3, *Sheen.* 4, *Rathe.* 5, *Antelopes.* 7, *Alibi.* 8, *Piggery.* 9, *Barnacle.* 15, *Nepotism.* 16, *Tall order.* 17, *Loveliest.* 18, *Opaline.* 20, *Settler.* 22, *Bucks.* 23, *Score.* 24, *Patio.*

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MICHAEL GILBERT What would *you* do if you found yourself trailing a Field Marshal among the granite and jam jars? Take two aspirins? Or do as Detective Patrick Petrella did and switch on your torch?

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PLACE OF STONES

In the centre of the moonlit pit,
alone and unbound, stood the warrior maiden

BY JOHN SALT

CHICO HERERA, called The Silent, sat on the step of the mouldering hacienda and occupied his time by being very much afraid. The rifle he had been cleaning rested slantwise across his knees, and his eyes followed the direction in which the barrel pointed.

The view was extensive and depressing. A waste of sere and tortured bush merged into patches of dry grassland burnt ochre by the sun, and beyond that the desert stretched away in a shimmer of heat to the lower foothills of the unexplored Sierra Lobos. Something in the brooding silence of the deserted homestead breathed the terror of death into Chico's soul, and he cursed himself comprehensively in a variety of patois for having to make the trip.

It all came from getting drunk in Belem. Certainly, there wasn't much else to do in Belem, but if only he had remained a little more sober, or a little less drunk . . . That brawl in the Cantina do Sul hadn't helped, either, or the sudden need to get out of Belem in a hurry. So Chico had gone with the Dutchman, Hendrik Willemse, and his daughter Anna, travelling upstream with them to the smell of river mud and gasolene that was Manaos, while the American, Carter, remained in the coast city, recruiting more porters and buying more guns.

Carter was an explorer with a business instinct and a gift for the spectacular; he would exploit any new discovery to commercial advantage. Willemse, on the other hand, a naturalist employed by an international foundation, was an academic, a mild, dreamy man of enduring patience and monumental obstinacy. He shared a common goal with Carter, however—the ancient, legendary quest for that which was lost in past centuries but might still be preserved in some secret valley beyond the inner mountain ring.

The two explorers had met in Belem, with some idea at first of joining forces. Then Ralph Carter had fallen in love with Anna Willemse, and she with him. After a violent quarrel between

Carter and Willemse, the team had split up. Willemse had left Belem before his preparations were complete, merely to steal a march on the American and to keep him and Anna apart. Chico, with the police on his trail, had no choice but to join them.

He looked up now, watching with secret approval, as Anna came out from the ruined hacienda. She was a tall girl in her early twenties, with the fair hair of her race and a pale, smooth complexion that the sun of Amazonas could not harm. "Have you seen my father?" she called to him.

Herera made a vague gesture. "He is somewhere at the back of the house, by the stream," he replied, admiring through half-closed eyes the unstudied grace of her movements as she walked slowly forward and sat down beside him on the rotten planking.

"Who lived here?" she asked.

Chico eyed her warily. "Who knows?" he answered. "Some settler, perhaps, who found the life too hard and moved away." He did not propose to tell her what he had found when he first entered the building.

"That is not so, Chico," the girl said gravely. "Within the house there are places set for a meal that was never eaten. The people were disturbed at their food and they did not return. You must have seen, and I think you should speak of these things to me. Tell me, Chico, what are the tales?"

The tales were known from Rio to Panama but Chico would not talk about them, having a superstition that to speak of evil things was to invoke their power. "There are no tales, señorita," he said stubbornly.

"Well then, Chico, what do you think? You may tell me. I shall not be afraid."

"I do not know, señorita, but this I will say to you, I do not like the hills."

They sat silent upon the verandah, both staring into the hazy distance. "You are right," said Anna presently. "The hills sleep but they are full of menace, more so than the jungles through which we travelled, where death is everywhere and one must be alert to avoid it."

Herera set himself to break the uncomfortable train of thought. "Do we return then towards Manaos, señorita? We have no carriers now and very few provisions."

Anna shrugged. "It is for my father to say," she replied. "He was greatly excited when we found the hacienda and he is sure that the land we seek lies just beyond the hills."

Herera shuddered. "I seek no such land," he said. "Better to go back now to the last peon village and wait there for Señor Carter's party."

A smile lit the girl's face, making her suddenly beautiful. " You think he will come? "

" All gringos are mad," said Chico roughly. " Decidedly he will come." As he reached inside his shirt for tobacco pouch and papers, his fingers encountered a tightly rolled wad of paper. His mind flew back to the last night in Belem when Carter gave him a letter for Anna. He pulled it out and thrust the crumpled envelope at Anna. " Read this," he cried, for he guessed what the letter contained, " and you will say with me that we should go back."

" We shall not go back, but onward to the hills." It was Willemse, who had appeared suddenly from behind the hacienda. A tall, bony man, in shapeless clothes, he walked towards them with a shambling gait. His face would have appeared heavy and stupid but for his narrow blue eyes, which were penetrating in their gaze and highly intelligent.

" There is nothing for it but to go on," he repeated. " We have not enough supplies to return to the village, but we might be able to reach those hills over yonder, and there our journey may very well end."

This was Chico's own opinion, but he did not voice it, for there was something uncommonly daunting about the Dutchman. He put the letter back into his shirt—Anna had scarcely noticed it—and stared sullenly at Willemse. " I do not think we should continue," he grumbled.

" You do not have to, but I shall and so will Anna," said Willemse. He turned away to pick up his rucksack and added indifferently, " I think you will die upon your return journey."

Anna, too, had begun to prepare herself for the march, and Chico watched father and daughter uncertainly. Finally he picked up his rifle and ostentatiously released the safety catch before slinging it into position over his shoulder.

" I do not approve of guns," said Willemse coldly.

" Kill or be killed," Chico replied on a note of rising anger, then stopped short and stared.

A dozen silent figures were standing motionless a few feet away. Chico gave a strangled cry and swiftly levelled his rifle, finger at the trigger. The next instant Willemse had wrested it from his grasp and flung it on the ground. Chico glared at him in amazement, then turned again towards the intruders.

They were women, tall beyond the average, dressed in short white tunics with leather harness ornamented with gold bosses, and they carried short, broad-bladed spears. Expecting every instant to hear the death hiss of a spear and feel the blade piercing his back, Herera dashed blindly across the verandah and into the

main room of the ruined homestead. He tore out Carter's letter again and scribbled two words on the envelope with a stub of pencil.

There was a rush of footsteps as he thrust the letter down among the dusty crockery on the table and turned to face his pursuers.

The butt of a spear took him full between the eyes and stretched him unconscious on the floor.

The sun revived him minutes later and he found himself lying outside on the sand. A wave of nausea passed over him as he raised himself to look round at Anna and Willemse, seated near-by. They were not bound, but their captors squatted in a close semicircle around them.

" What now? " Chico whispered to the Dutchman.

Willemse shrugged his shoulders. " I think they mean to take us to the mountains," he said. " Soon we shall know what is there."

Herera stared at the Dutchman and shuddered: the man was mad for his lost city—for him nothing else counted. His eyes moved to the silent group of warrior women, and he gasped in sudden horror.

Willemse chuckled grimly. " Beauties, aren't they? Blinded, all but one, and she's the leader. They can't see a thing but they know every move we make. They chased and brought you down and they could do it again, however carefully you tried."

Something, some grain of comfort stirred in Chico, deep below the horror. Legend had it that if the warrior maidens laid eyes upon men outside their own country, they themselves must pay the penalty with their lives. So now they were blinded and trained to track their quarry by sound and touch alone. Chico hid his head in his arms and prayed silently.

At the end of an hour water was brought to them and they were prodded to their feet. Chico, his face bruised and aching, walked slightly ahead of Anna and Willemse, and the three of them marched inside an open crescent formed by the warrior women. After a few miles the prairie became desert and progress was slow through the sand. It was bitterly cold at night, and they slept in a huddle without blankets beneath a sky that was royal-blue velvet slashed with a milky galaxy of stars.

Two days' marching brought them to the nearer hills where, among the rocks, were pools of water, pellucid and icy in lichen-grown caverns and grottoes. Now the march became a climb, and for the captives it was Willemse who set the pace, his long spare body moving tirelessly as a steam-engine up the lower mountain slopes. The rock formations were in odd cushiony

shapes as if at some time they had flowed molten over the brim of a monstrous cauldron and solidified.

As the party toiled through the lower passes the central massif began to appear. Peak topped snow peak into an infinite blue distance, while immediately before them lay a jumble of tortured, jagged rock shapes like shattered masonry cast down by a giant hand. As they emerged from one narrow defile, the guards halted. Willemse, whose binoculars had not been taken from him, raised them to his eyes and focused them on an oddly shaped rock tower in the middle distance, capped by a sugar-loaf formation which bore some resemblance to a human head.

He was shaking with excitement when he turned to Anna. "That rock," he said. "I'd swear, even at this distance, that it was carved by human hands. Take the glasses, Anna, you look."

The girl did not keep the glasses long and she shook her head as she handed them back. "It is the wind and the ice of winter, Father. The altitude is making you imagine things."

The scientist shook his head obstinately and gave the binoculars to Chico. "You look, then," he commanded. "Tell me what you think."

Herera focused the powerful lenses upon the rock and studied it long and carefully. Willemse saw the Indian's body tense and he snapped at him impatiently, "Well? What do you see?"

Chico said dully, "It is as you say. A statue carved from rock, three hundred feet high."

"It's madness," cried Anna. "I won't believe it."

"Why not?" her father demanded. "You have seen the heads of American presidents carved upon a cliff face. There can be other civilizations capable of such things. What else do you see, Chico? What does the statue represent?"

The Indian was impassive. "It is the face of the Aztec god Uitzilopochtli, the Eater of Men. He whom the Spanish soldiers named 'Witchywolves.'"

"Now who is crazy?" screamed Willemse. "An Aztec god in Central America! I don't believe in your god, Chico."

But Chico had seen the proud stone face many times in the ruined shrines of old Mexico, and he remembered the fear of it that struck him one night down near the railway yards in Mexico City where men said that the ancient ones made their last stand.

After another half day of toiling march, a change came over the formation of the guard. Having reached the base of the statue, the eleven blinded women laid hands upon their leader, the one who still had sight. They took away her spear and bound her hands with the harness from her costume. She was made to

move in with the other three captives for the remainder of the journey and she accepted the reversal of fortune with silent fatalism, never attempting to struggle or escape. Willemse and Anna regarded the incident with frank astonishment; Chico alone realized that the twelfth woman was a hostage to death.

The way now led down a rock-strewn slope from the escarpment on which the statue stood, and the path descended in a long diagonal line to the brink of a canyon. Here a rock funnel like a crude staircase descended into the valley. As they climbed lower the captives could feel the air grow warmer and hear the sound of swiftly running water. In the background, too, was a rumbling sound like a great waterfall, but the noise ceased from time to time and they knew it could not be the river.

During one of these silences, a piercing scream rang out. It echoed in dying cadence down the valley, to be drowned at length in a renewal of the rumbling sound. The twelfth woman raised her head and paused an instant in her descent. Chico saw that she trembled violently and twisted her hands cruelly behind her in a vain attempt to free them from the leather thongs. Then a look of hopelessness passed over her face and she put her head down again and continued on her way.

They reached the valley floor and splashed through the icy torrent of the river towards what seemed a blank rock wall. But as they drew near its cracked and faulted face, a narrow pass appeared, through which their guards urged them in single file. When they emerged, there lay before them a wide and smiling valley, green with lush grass and starred with mountain flowers. Their path skirted the verge of a wide blue lake, from which wildfowl rose in agitated clouds at their approach, while beyond the water, glimmering in an enchanted distance, rose the white walls and buildings of a small town.

Willemse was like a man possessed. His eyes shone, and he mumbled idiotically over and over again, "The lost city, I have found the lost city."

At intervals along the path were small stone guardhouses, their wood shutters fast bolted. Just outside the city they came upon an immense pyramid temple, tiered to the summit with hundreds of shallow steps and crowned with an altar and the giant figures of two gods.

Willemse snatched at Chico's arms and whispered hoarsely. "You were right, man, this *is* Aztec. What preservation! Incredible, in this day and age."

Chico glanced across at Anna. The girl walked proudly, with head erect, looking neither to right nor left. She did not seem afraid, and Chico envied her.

As they approached the city its grandeur diminished. The buildings were of dressed stone that would endure as long as the mountains, but the windows and doors were innocent of frame or ornament and many of the great houses seemed empty. The tessellated pavements were broken, and grass and creeping bush climbed from the cracks. The statues in the wide central square had fallen from their pedestals, and an air of desolation brooded over the city.

Three lonely male figures awaited them at the entrance to a large building. The warrior women made deep obeisance and pushed their prisoners forward. The central figure was a man of great age, mestizo in appearance, with a face deeply carved and wrinkled. He was almost bald but small tufts of hair, like shreds of dirty cotton wool, still clung in places to his lean skull. His robe was of purple wool and he wore flat sandals of rough leather.

His two companions were much younger men and seemingly of a different race. Less sturdy than the spearwomen, they were more truly Indian in appearance and there was a bluish tinge to their faces, due probably to the altitude of the valley. Their robes had once been white but now were daubed and smeared with nameless dyes.

Chico saw, with a sinking heart, that their hair was long and dressed high on their heads, plastered there in a tangled knot with a reddish-black substance which he guessed to be blood. They were priests of the mountain god and the twelfth maiden was handed into their care.

One stretched out his hand to take Anna too, but the old man restrained him.

The elder surveyed the prisoners for some moments in silence, then spoke two or three words in an unknown tongue to the spearwomen, who closed in once again. The patriarch led the way down a long stone passage to a cell at the far end. He stood aside as the guards pushed their prisoners in, and departed without further speech.

There were animal skins on the floor of the cell, and light came from a high window. A charcoal brazier glowed in one corner and there were a number of couches in red wood heaped with coloured Indian blankets. Anna stood staring in amazement at a picture hanging from a spike driven into the stone wall. It was a cheap print of the Virgin, faded with age.

She took it from the wall and turned it over idly in her hand. The date was pencilled on the cardboard back: 15 June, 1950, and with the date some words in Spanish. Anna puzzled over them a moment, then asked Chico to translate.

He did so reluctantly. *Pedro died today. They will not keep me now. I fear the women—* The scrawl ended abruptly in mid sentence as if the writer had been summoned suddenly.

"What does it mean?" the girl asked, and there was quiet desperation in her voice.

Chico shrugged, too weary to fence any longer. "It is without doubt the handwriting of Pilar Mendoro, and she tells of the death of her husband. They were the people who owned the hacienda where we ourselves were captured."

"You knew of this?"

"I had heard something, señorita, but there are many such tales, and I had no wish to frighten you."

Anna looked at him helplessly. "But I still do not understand. Why, if her husband had died, should they no longer keep her?"

Willemse, who had been studying the relic, spoke for the first time. "I think I can answer that. From what we have seen outside, this must be a dying city. There may not be many people left in it and I should imagine that they are mainly female. Even their soldiers are women, and the men we saw are not young. They need new blood, new men, and they dare not go far afield to find them but must wait until fools stray too far into the trap. Pedro Mendoro was one, apparently; and now Chico and I . . ."

"You do not mention me, Father," the girl said.

"I have said, Anna, they do not need women," the Dutchman replied. He turned to Herera. "Had you heard any of this before?"

"There are always stories, Senor Willemse," Chico replied evasively.

"This one seems to have a basis in fact," the other said dryly.

"But how did it come about, this strange survival?" Anna asked.

"That is hard to say. There are rumours old as man himself concerning lost cities and forgotten civilizations. Perhaps there was a native Toltec or Aztec culture here in the dark ages or, more probably, there were refugees from the coast, fleeing from tribal warfare. They settled here in secret and died out over the years —their own wasteful blood sacrifices would have helped the process along. Then some warlike mountain tribe found and subjugated them, keeping some of the old customs, discarding others. To judge by the look of those fearsome priests and by that scream we heard, they kept the blood sacrifice at least. And in time they, too, began to die out."

He smiled grimly at Herera. "I have a shrewd idea, Chico,

that you and I are being considered as the fathers of a new race."

Their talk was interrupted at this point by the arrival of two women guards bearing trays of food. They set them down upon the floor in the middle of the cell and remained to watch the prisoners eat. All three were hungry, and the presence of the guard did not disturb them. The food was heavily spiced and the drink that went with it was cloudy and aromatic. Willemse took a draught at his and spat it out. Chico followed his example. Anna sipped at hers and found it to be water; they shared it round between them.

The women took away the trays after the meal and withdrew. Outside, the moon rose over the mountain wall, casting long shadows into the cell. The fire from the brazier gave a faintly luminous sheen to the picture of the Virgin which Anna had fixed again to the wall. She lay awake, watching the picture, thinking of the abandoned hacienda, and pondering the fate of Pilar and Pedro Mendoro.

Several hours passed and again the guards entered the cell. They took Chico and Willemse away with them, and Anna lay sleepless, sick with fear, until their return. The men came back as day was breaking. Willemse looked grey and old; Chico, too, was visibly shaken. They would not speak but rolled themselves at once into their blankets and fell into a heavy sleep.

Next day the Dutchman returned evasive answers to all his daughter's questions, and it was Chico who at length told her the truth. "There is a tale in your histories, señorita," he said. "It concerns the maidens of Montezuma who, with drink and music, sought to seduce the soldiers of Spain to their deaths. Now history is being repeated, and it seems to your father and to me that our case is the more desperate."

Three times Chico and Willemse were taken from the cell. When the guards came on the fourth night, they took Anna also. Willemse pressed his daughter's hand as they left the building. "They have tried one way and now they will try another," he said. "They will not succeed, but I think that tonight we must be very brave."

The full moon turned the city to silver, making the stone buildings seem insubstantial and unreal, a theatre set of pasteboard and tinsel. The guards led them through the city and out onto a high plateau. Walking became a studied effort, and Willemse, weakened by his three-days' ordeal, breathed heavily and leaned on Chico as they approached a strange amphitheatre in the rocks, palely floodlit by the white moon.

The pit was more than two hundred yards in circumference,

with steeply shelving sides and a floor raised in odd wedge-shaped planes of varying height. A white-clad audience lined the rim of the pit, and at one end, on a raised platform, was a group of figures standing behind a heap of loose boulders. The guards urged their captives forward to the very edge of the pit and stood behind them, with the points of their spears pressed against their backs so that they could not turn aside.

Down in the centre of the pit, clearly illumined by the moon, stood the twelfth warrior maiden who had guided the raiding party. She stood alone and unbound on one of the inclined planes. Suddenly, one of the group at the far end of the pit moved and the first of the boulders thundered down. A rumbling sound filled the whole valley as the great stone bounced at the foot of the slope and glanced off the first of the inclined planes, bounced again, and swept past the sacrifice at shoulder height within a foot of her head.

A gasp went up from the crowd. Anna sobbed, and tried to turn her head away, but a needle-pointed spear pricked her cheek and forced her to gaze once more down into the pit. A second stone, larger than the first, rushed down with the speed of an express train. It bounced only once and soared straight over the head of the Amazon to shatter into fragments against the farther wall. Again the crowd gasped.

Now they began to play with her. Several small stones glanced and richocheted from side to side without touching the captive. Then, quite suddenly, the crowd became aware of the moment of truth, and tensed in anticipation. Within the heart of Chico an ancient, primeval hatred stirred, driving out all fear.

Very slowly the priests levered the final stone into position and, as they did so, the nerve of the warrior maiden broke. She rushed screaming around the pit, darting from one side to another until her shrieks were lost in the rumble of the boulder and her life extinguished beneath it.

At once the priests scrambled down to dabble their hands and garments in the blood of the victim and to smear it afresh into their hair. The ring of spears held the captives still, constraining them to watch the obscene ritual to the last. Anna and her father swayed upon their feet; Chico remained outwardly unmoved, rendered aloof and uplifted by the great hate that was within him.

When at last the ceremony ended, they were made to turn about and found themselves faced once again by the patriarch. Behind him in their white robes stood the people of the city. They were not many in number—two or three hundred, perhaps—and among them were no children and but few men, most of them elderly. The temper of the crowd was dangerous; excited

by the blood sacrifice, they milled and eddied, pressing raggedly forward against the ring of warrior maidens.

Chico turned his attention to the patriarch. The old man's thin lips smiled faintly and there was a light of triumph in his eyes. He stretched out a long skinny arm towards the pit, and mimed the scene of sacrifice with rapid snapping gestures of his bony fingers. Then he pointed to Anna and looked hard at the two men to make sure they caught his meaning. In conclusion he raised his arm again and spread the fingers of his hand, holding them upright and rigid in the moonglow. Five days he counted, pointed to the waning moon, to the pit, and once again at Anna.

The warriors closed around Chico, Willemse, and the girl, and marched them off behind the elder. The crowd surged in behind them, forming a procession with the executioner priests who bore with them the heart of the slaughtered Amazon. Led by the priests, the crowd took up a barbaric chant, shrill as the wind through mountain passes, as they made their slow way back towards the lost city.

The guards handled them more roughly than before, hustling them back into the cell with scant ceremony. Willemse sat down by Anna's side and put an arm about her. They did not speak, and after a time, one leaning against the other, they seemed to sleep.

But Chico did not sleep. Instead, he began to think, for hatred had roused him from his preoccupation with fear, and his mind worked lucidly as it had not done since the capture. He began to remember things, distances mainly and landmarks. He considered, too, the hours in a day and the things that may be done within them, so that when dawn came to light the cell he had reached certain conclusions and was no longer a man completely without hope.

When the others woke he began to tell them of his thoughts. Willemse remained listless and apathetic, but Anna listened eagerly as Chico spoke of the letter and the two words he had scribbled on it. Two words in Spanish, *it's true*, would tell Carter all, for he knew the legend surrounding the derelict building. And then? Surely the señorita knew the Americano to be a man of great courage and intelligence. He would follow their tracks to the mountains and all would be well.

The girl leaned forward impulsively and pressed Chico's hand. He looked into her eyes and knew that he did not have to tell her how improbable it was that Carter would ever find his way through the mountain labyrinth to the lost valley. She knew all that and more besides, and yet she would nurse the infinitely

tiny seed of hope that Chico had planted. Willemse paid no attention to either of them but withdrew into himself and would not speak.

There were no more night disturbances, but sometimes during the day they were allowed to stroll under guard in the strange stone wilderness of the plaza. Willemse no longer seemed to have any interest in the relics of the ancient civilization that surrounded them. All his solicitude was for Anna and he would walk close by her side, casting suspicious glances around him. The girl herself seemed to move in a kind of trance.

And each day the sun went down, and the dying moon lit the lost valley . . .

The patriarch came to see them early on the fifth day, before it was fully light; he stood in the doorway gazing earnestly at the two men. Willemse looked at Anna with unspoken entreaty. The girl smiled sadly at him and very slightly shook her head. Chico caught the gesture and glanced at the Dutchman. The face of the naturalist was grey and hard; he seemed made of stone, incapable of movement or speech. It was Chico who gave the patriarch his answer, spitting on the floor of the cell at the old man's feet.

Bitter anger flooded the face of the priest; he turned abruptly and left the cell. The heavy door thudded into place behind him and they were alone.

But he came again at moonrise, a questioning look in his eyes. It was too much for Willemse and this time he nodded his head violently, willing to promise anything to save the girl. Chico hardened his heart and gripped the Dutchman by the shoulders. "No, señor!" he hissed. "There is still time, even for half an hour, even to the very last, there is still time."

Willemse looked at him bitterly. "Time," he repeated. "Time for what? We cannot sacrifice Anna." But the Indian was insistent. Willemse saw the half-mad glint in his eyes and yielded. The patriarch rapped a harsh order.

At once the women seized all three and forced them out of the building into the plaza where a procession was already moving slowly upwards to the place of stones. Willemse raved noisily, protesting his willingness to comply with any demand, but the guards ignored him now.

Chico alone continued to hope, even when they tore the girl from her father, bore her down to the pit, and placed her where the Amazon had stood. But his self-control was going and he had opened his mouth to shout when the first explosion came.

The crowd around the theatre fell silent, and all preparations for the sacrifice were halted while priests and worshippers gazed

down the valley in the direction from which the sound had come and where now a red glow lit the night sky.

A second explosion set the echoes thundering, as a guard from the farther outpost, begrimed and breathless, staggered over the escarpment and fell at the feet of the patriarch.

The priest knelt to hear her message, then pointed his arms at the Dutchman and Herera, calling orders to the guards. Swiftly the men were seized and hurried down the slope into the pit where both were placed on an inclined platform lower than the one on which Anna stood and some twenty feet away.

The sound of fresh explosions was heard as the pit swiftly emptied and the executioners mounted to their place behind the barrier of rolling-stones. From far away—too far away—came the sharp staccato rattle of rifle-fire, punctuating the silence between intermittent explosions.

Chico guessed that Carter was dynamiting the blockhouses. He tried not to think how many there were.

Willemse had recovered his dignity and stood calmly by his side. He glanced across at Anna; she, too, stood motionless, her white dress gleaming under the pale moon. Chico no longer thought there was any hope and he raised his eyes to where the executioners stood, and waited with tense nerves for the first stone. It hurtled down the slope and struck the floor of the pit with terrific force. The shock made the earth tremble, and flying splinters grazed his face.

A swift glance told him that Anna was unscathed and although Willemse had ducked to his knees at the moment of impact, he knew that the Dutchman, too, had escaped.

The second stone bounced high and flew over their heads but Chico knew that the third was for him. He forced his body to straighten up and opened his eyes wide, looking upwards at the priests as they toiled to move the killing stone into position. One of the executioners was a grotesquely tall man who waved his arms about wildly as if urging his companions to fresh efforts.

Now he quite suddenly spun about, flinging his arms upwards, and fell forward on his face.

Chico realized, with quiet satisfaction, that the man had been shot through the head. He heard a second shot distinctly and saw another of the priests collapse among the stones.

But it was too late, for the third boulder, his own, was already on its way. He had a brief glimpse of an immense shape, larger than the world, hurtling down.

Then blackness descended.

After a long time, from very far away, he began to hear the

sound of familiar voices and somewhere, it seemed to his fanciful brain, the noise of swiftly running water. He heard his name spoken and felt gentle hands moving about his body and over his head. He moved very slightly but stopped at once for the pain was acute.

" Is he badly hurt? " asked the girl.

" I'm afraid so," replied the voice of Ralph Carter. " Two or three ribs caved in and a broken leg. We shall have trouble getting him down to the plain. Lucky the stone split before it struck him or there would have been another sacrifice for those blood-drunk maniacs back there."

Chico listened intently for the voice of Willemse, and when it came he sighed deeply and opened his eyes. He was lying in the canyon outside the hidden valley, beside a rushing mountain stream. Carter leaned close and Chico struggled painfully to speak. " You found the letter, then? " he whispered.

The American nodded. " Among the breakfast things," he joked. " I couldn't miss it."

" And you followed our trail? "

" By guess and by God. It was easy enough until we came to the mountains, then we took the most practicable route, hoping it was also the right one. We found your stone god and crossed the river just below, but then we were completely foxed. I spent nearly a week prowling up and down the rock wall. There had to be an opening somewhere—there was certainly a valley beyond, the aerial pictures showed that—but we should never have found it without one of the warrior women. The lady was a little too confident and we managed to follow where she went. The rest you know."

Chico's voice grew weaker for the fever was rising. " What about—back there? "

" They'll keep," Carter told him grimly. " A stick of dynamite sealed the pass with a few thousand tons of rock. There won't be any pursuit, but we have heard the stones again so I suppose they are busy liquidating a few more inhabitants to appease the wrath of Uitzilopochtli. Wonder who they picked on this time."

" I hope very much that it was the old one," said Chico with concentrated venom, and closed his eyes again.

He slept after that and when he awakened it was night. A fire burnt nearby and farther off in the shadows he could see the bearers and equipment of the expedition. Willemse and Carter were sitting round the fire with Anna, and he caught snatches of their talk.

" You have something to lecture on now, eh, Hendrik? " It was Carter who spoke.

The Dutchman sounded gloomy. "I suppose so, yet what have I found? A dying civilization given over to the cult of death; a return to the primitive with nothing left of loveliness. I shall call it the place of stones, the abomination of cities."

Carter put his arm round Anna and held her close. "Of stones indeed," he said in a quieter tone. "An apt title, Hendrik, since we both found what we sought."

"I do not understand you," Willemse said gruffly.

"Stones, my friend, we both found stones. For you the foundations of the past and for me the foundations of the future. Moon metal, Hendrik, that's what they hurled at you. Great knobs and chunks of pure uranium. Now do you understand?"

Bowed down by the revelation, Willemse said, "It does not increase my happiness. What does it mean to you, Anna?"

The girl smiled at him and gently disengaged herself from her lover. "I no longer care," she replied. "We are safe and that is all that matters to me now—except perhaps for one thing I must know." She walked across to where Chico lay, and knelt down to whisper close to his ear. "Are you waking, Chico?"

"I dream a little, señorita, yet I wake."

"Tell me then, Chico, if you can. If Señor Carter had not come to our rescue, would you have done what the priests asked?"

He looked at Anna with dark, sad eyes. "*Quién sabe?*" said Herera the laconic. "I am a hard man to drive, señorita."

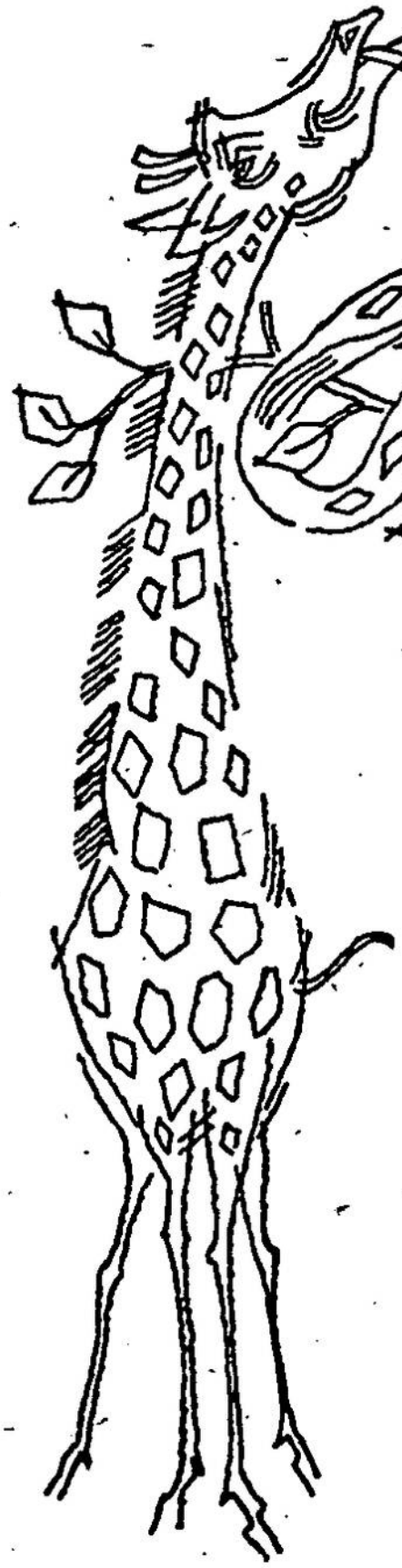
★ ★ ★

TIME AND PLACE COMPETITION

To judge by their entries for this competition, Argosy readers are a race of athletes, philosophers, explorers, and eccentrics. Favourite Argosy-reading locations ranged from Tangier beach to the waters of the Tay; enthusiasts curl up with their copies in letter-boxes and dog-kennels, and one student of Yoga even reads Argosy upside-down while doing his exercises. We felt little sympathy with the reader who sits on a squid's head and uses the tentacles as a book rest, but much with Mrs. Nell Brown, of East London, South Africa, for her charming verse:

To enjoy the Argosy, do as I do,
Cuddle down in a cosy pouch, à la Kangaroo.

She gets a half-guinea consolation prize and we wish we could reproduce the photograph! Our first prize is divided between ex-frogman L.P.M. Davies, R.N., Dorset, for reading Argosy twenty foot down, sitting on a propeller-shaft (we believe him, too) and Flt.-Lt. Mooney, Preston, Lancs., who does his reading in the Control Tower at 3 a.m. They receive a guinea each.



Whose Zoo?

A little zoo-logic and gaiety
For naturalists and the laity

Giraffes

I wonder if giraffes
Feel draffes;
Not over-draffes with cheques
But door draffes in neques.

J. G. BENNETTE

Porcupines

Porcupines
Are noted for their spines.
This makes them partickly
Prickly.

A. H. BAYNES

Tigers, Lions

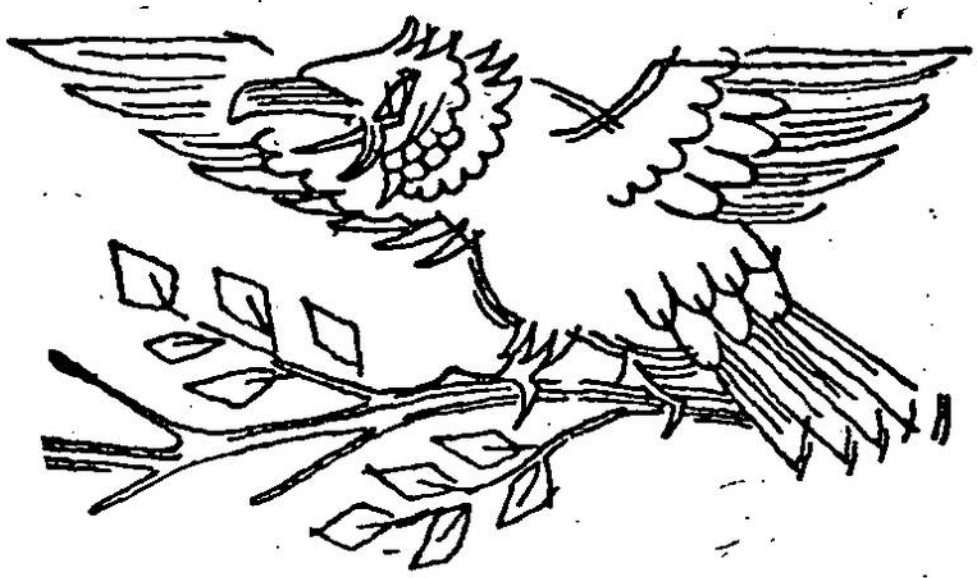
"Now this one," remarked Sir Palomides, with pride, "is Tigris. We have him in Ind. The way to catch cubs of same is to throw down a glass ball at his feet. Tiger, observing self smally reflected in glass ball, takes reflection for own cub, which hunter proceeds to remove."

"An interestin' hobby," said Sir Grummore. "Got many tigers round here?"

"None."

"Then we must think of somethin' else."

The two knights discussed the pictures for a long time. There



were several good ones of lions: which will always spare prostrate men or captives, are afraid of white cocks (the lion in this picture was putting its poor head between its paws with a pathetic gesture on seeing one) and which also use their foliated tails for brushing out their tracks when pursued.

T. H. WHITE, *The Witch in the Wood*

Parrots

The parrot is so slow in wits
He eats the perch on which he sits;
To check which habit the Almighty
Ordained a perch of lignum vitae.

ANON.

Llamas, Elephants

The llama's haughty aspect hides
A lloving heart, I think. Besides,
I like its undulating torso—
Like Miss Llamour, only more so.
The elephant, a noble beast,
Is met with chiefly in The East,
Also at Southsea, where Aunt Melisande
Keeps its foot as an umbrellistande.

ISOBEL HUNTER

Coon Feeding

Racket was half grown before he would touch anything but rich, warm milk. How so ferocious an infant clung so long to the bottle, I do not know, unless he knew that it made the most trouble. He was brought to me as a baby. A coloured boy brought me two in a cracker box, and remembering . . . that of the twin young of many mammals, one would have a mean eye and one a kind eye, I picked. My mistake—I picked Racket. I fed him from a baby's nursing bottle and in a few days he had learned to lie on his back and balance it on his stomach with his hind paws, gripping the top with his forepaws. In a week, he had learned, when done with the milk, to chew the rubber nipple to bits. It took more nipples to raise him than to raise the Dionnes: when offered canned salmon, cooked fish and scrambled eggs, he growled menacingly and I hurried to replace his so-called natural foods with milk. If insufficiently warm or with too low a percentage of cream, he took a chunk out of my hand.

MARJORIE KINNAN RAWLINGS, *Cross Creek*

Bats and Possums

The little bat hangs upside down,
And downside up the possum.
To show a smile they have to frown,
Say those who've run across 'em.

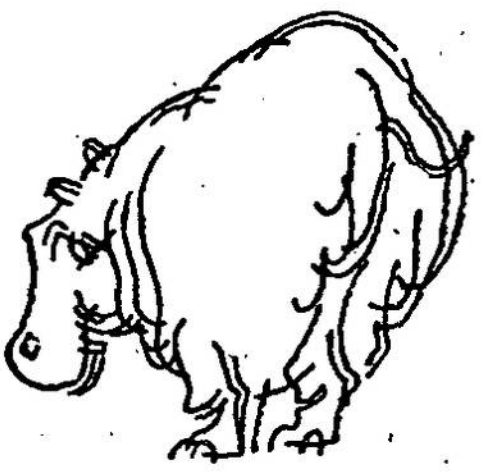
DAVID MCCORD, *Point of View*

Hippopotamus

In English, the word hippopotamus means "river horse." Why don't they just call the animal by that name?—*News Item*

I do not like the substitute
I'll stick with hippopotamus
What name could better suit a brute
So hippy and so bottomous?

DON FASER



A PATRICK PETRELLA STORY

THE GIRL WHO MOVED

She smiled out of the silver frame
like a cat near an absent-minded mouse

BY MICHAEL GILBERT

WHEN mass-radiography came to Pound End, Detective-Constable Patrick Petrella went along to cast an eye over the crowd. There was a little German electrician called Gauner who was said to be in his district but who was proving curiously elusive. He failed to find Herr Gauner, but encountered Maggie Bishop. Maggie was blonde, thin, and just over seven years old. She was entertaining the queue with an impersonation of the Lady Mayoress of the borough. " And now on this horse-pisshus occasion," Petrella heard as he came up, " my dear, dear people—you don't mind me calling you dear, dear people—? "

The queue didn't mind at all. Petrella felt that it was an occasion for discretion. He removed himself out of earshot.

Having met Maggie once it was no surprise to him to meet her again. This time it was outside Doctor Coster's surgery. It was Maggie, as usual, who took the offensive.

" Why jew run away when I was doing my act? " she said.

Petrella apologized. The apology was accepted.

" You know why I'm here? "

" To have your face lifted," suggested Petrella.

Maggie lifted her face with both hands, to see what it felt like, and then shook her flaxen head. " I moved," she explained.

Petrella looked blank.

" When the man was takin' those photographs."

Petrella said, slowly, " The radiographer. Yes. I remember." He was conscious of a sinking sensation.

" I was the only one in my lot who moved. That's what old Coster said. So I had to come back for another lot, see? "

Petrella imagined that he saw only too well.

As Maggie was turning away, she added, " That's just what they tell the kids, ennit? He wanted me back because there was something wrong with me. I know, I know." She scudded off with a diabolical grin before Petrella could find anything to say. He had a word with Doctor Coster, and was unaccountably relieved to discover that the whole thing was a false alarm.

The doctor said, " We did think we saw a shadow on the original photograph. It would have been most unusual, at that age. But we had to check up."

" And it wasn't anything? "

" Nothing at all. Probably a flaw in the negative. Very healthy child, as a matter of fact. Curiously old for her age."

" They grow up quickly in Pound End," said Petrella, and continued on his desultory search for Gauner.

Herr Gauner was something out of the usual run. He was an electronic engineer. And, according to reports from Interpol, was one of the few men who could make the time-lock on a modern safe stand up and sing songs. Petrella knew nothing about electronics, but he knew something about safes, having served a youthful apprenticeship in a lock-making firm in Cairo.

Thus, when two reports arrived on Superintendent Haxtell's desk, he pinned them together and sent for Petrella.

The first contained extracts from the Interpol dossier on Gauner. The second was a report, unconfirmed, that Gauner had reached England via Harwich and was thought to be in London.

" Before the war," concluded the report, " Gauner's family lived in the Pound End district and the attention of the Chief Superintendent Q Division is drawn to the possibility that he might revisit this part of London."

" Better keep an eye open for him," said Haxtell unhopefully. " But don't ask me what we're going to do with him if we find him. He isn't wanted for anything in this country, as far as I know—yet."

So Petrella added Herr Gauner to a long mental list and then, having forgotten all about him, saw him three weeks later in a crowd, outside Crown Road Tube Station. He had only two dim Interpol photographs to go by, but he felt certain that he was right. He followed discreetly and, five minutes later, from a position of safety in a telephone kiosk, had the satisfaction of

watching Gauner let himself in by the yard door at the back of one of the small shop premises in Leybourne Street.

It was a detached house, an architectural afterthought at the end of a row of wholly attached and similar villas. Petrella let Gauner have five minutes to settle, then he quitted his shelter and walked round to the front. The detached house proved to be a small photographer's establishment. And staring out of a silver frame, in a position of honour, in the middle of the display window, was Maggie, smiling just like a cat who has walked up on an absent-minded mouse.

The sign over the window said, *Frank Bishop, Photographer. Child Portraiture a Speciality.*

" We could check up on Mr. Bishop," agreed Haxtell, when Petrella reported to him. " Do you know anything about him? "

" I've met his daughter," said Petrella.

" Gauner being there—if he is Gauner—makes sense in a way," said Haxtell. " It's at the back of my mind that Bishop's really a Kraut. Bischoff. Changed his name in the 'thirties. Let's get the Aliens' Office working."

The Aliens' department of the Home Office confirmed Superintendent Haxtell's memory. Frank Bishop had once been Franz Bischoff of Dresden. He had come to England shortly after the First World War, bringing his wife and his camera with him. In 1935 his wife had died, and he had married again, a refugee from Hitler and—so Petrella guessed—a girl with more expensive tastes than the first Mrs. Bishop; for there had been trouble with creditors in 1939, and worse trouble in 1946, when a case had been prepared against Bishop for buying undutied cameras from soldiers. It had been dropped for lack of evidence. The second Mrs. Bishop had died after Maggie was born.

Petrella read it all twice, and wondered where a nearly bankrupt photographer with an angelic daughter might impinge on a world-famous safe-breaker. He set himself to observe Bishop's shop, and spent much of his spare time in a deserted first-storey workshop, with field-glasses. But beyond the fact that the man who looked like Gauner went out each morning after breakfast and came back after tea, he discovered nothing.

" Keep at it," said Haxtell. " Extradition may come through any day now. Then we'll have to chance our arm and pull him in. International complications, I shouldn't wonder."

That same night, just after twelve o'clock, Petrella was making his way quietly homewards, thinking of nothing but bed. It had been a broiling day, but a late evening breeze had come up off the river, and there was now some coolness in the air. A slice

of moon was playing hide-and-seek among the high clouds and, by its fitful light, Petrella observed Maggie Bishop.

She was in pyjamas, with a dressing-gown belted tightly round her slight figure, and she looked remarkably wide awake.

" Hullo, hullo," said Petrella. " If it isn't the girl who moved."

" Smee," said Maggie.

Petrella looked up and down the empty street. The lamps, in that part, went out at twelve. The moon had disappeared, and he had a feeling that, if he didn't watch very closely, Maggie might disappear, too. Only her flaxen head glinted in the shadows. " And just what are you up to? " he said, severely.

" I'm looking for Teddy," she said. " He'll be lonely without me."

" Who's Teddy? A boy? "

Maggie thought this was very funny. When she'd finished laughing she explained that Teddy was a bear.

" I think we'd better go home," said Petrella. " Take hold of my hand. It's dark."

" Teddy doesn't like the dark," agreed Maggie. " I don't mind it. I'm quite used to it, really."

Bishop's shop was as blind as the tomb. Repeated ringing of the bell produced no answer.

" It's no good ringing," said Maggie helpfully. " Daddy's having a party at the Mill, and Uncle G's working."

Petrella thought grimly that he would have something to say in the morning to a couple of men who left a child of seven alone in the house at night.

" The key's probberly under the doormat," she added.

Petrella found the front-door key and they went in. There was something wrong with the hall light; and, when he had groped his way in, with the light in the front room too.

" When Daddy goes out," explained Maggie, " he sometimes turns off all the lights. There's a big switch he turns off in the kitchen." Reflecting that if you were leaving a girl like Maggie alone in the house such a precaution showed a rudiment of common sense, Petrella stumbled down the stairs into the nether hell of the basement kitchen, and struck a match. There was a complicated contraption of boxes on the wall behind the door, out of the middle of which a switch stuck up.

Petrella pulled it down hopefully. Nothing happened at all. But before his match had spluttered out he saw something else. On the shelf, a new packet of candles.

Maggie was waiting patiently for him in the hall.

" Which is your bedroom? "

" Who said I was going to bed? "

" Now look here," said Petrella. " Just for once, be a good girl, and do what you're told. I'll light a candle and leave it with you. Then I'm going out to find that precious father of yours and bring him back."

Maggie considered the proposition, her head on one side. It was the thought of the candle that won her over.

" You'll leave it burning in a candlestick? "

" In a candlestick," promised Petrella.

Maggie led the way upstairs. It was a pathetic room. A small iron bed, with an underblanket, an overblanket and a pillow without even a pillowslip.

" Is that all your bedclothes? "

Maggie did not answer at once. She had her head in the corner cupboard. When she came out she was holding a fat blue-and-white bear by one leg.

" He was hiding in the cupboard," she explained.

Petrella tucked the girl and the bear into bed as best he could. Maggie said, " I've got lots more bedclothes, you know, and a proper eiderdown. They're at Aunt Tucker's."

If he hadn't been tired Petrella might have stopped to work this one out. As it was, he took a last look round to see that the candle was safe, said, " Count twenty slowly and we'll be back," and went out.

The Mill was a big all-night cafe. Being unlicensed, it kept what hours it liked. Petrella knew the proprietor, Sam Peggs, a phlegmatic man who spent his working life cooking enormous greasy meals for other people and lived off dry bread and bismuth.

If Bishop had gone on anywhere, Sam, who knew almost everything, would know where he had gone to. That problem resolved itself; as soon as he got within earshot of the Mill he heard Bishop.

The little man was sitting on the pavement outside the café. He had his socks and shoes off and was trying to wash his feet in the dogs' drinking-trough beside the road. A bored policeman had started by trying to persuade him to go home, and was just beginning to get angry. Sam Peggs was propping up his doorpost, chewing a piece of medicinal gum and watching the performance sourly.

" I dunno what came over him," he said to Petrella. " He's been in my place since eleven. I'd have said he was stone cold when he came in. Lookatim now."

" What's he up to, Peters? " asked Petrella.

" One more back answer out of him," said Constable Peters, " and I'm going to tuck him up in a nice little cell for the night."

Petrella looked down at Bishop and said, trying to keep the anger out of his voice, " Do you know, I found your daughter half an hour ago, walking in the streets in her night-clothes?"

All movement ceased. Petrella was aware of a pair of burning eyes looking up at him. They were not the eyes of a drunken man.

" She was afraid to go back into that house alone, poor kid. And I don't blame her. I put her to bed myself, and said I'd bring you back to look after her. I didn't think I'd find you, of all people, in this state— "

Petrella broke off. Bishop was getting up. He was ice-cold and steady as a rock; but his face was white and his eyes looked sick. " You did what? " he whispered.

" I took her back to your house," said Petrella, balancing to avoid the rush that was coming. " There was something wrong with the lights, but I found a packet of candles—"

Bishop sprang past Petrella, and the next minute he was flying down the road, his bare feet silent on the paving stones. Petrella turned and ran too, almost as silent in his rubbers. Behind him he could hear the boots of Constable Peters.

Bishop kept his lead. He got to his own front door ten yards ahead of Petrella, but lost time fumbling under the mat for the key that was no longer there. Then he realized the door was ajar, stumbled through, with Petrella's hand almost on his shoulder, along the hall, and down into the darkness of the kitchen.

Petrella heard him moving on the far side of the room, and suddenly the lights came on in the kitchen and the hall. And upstairs as well, evidently, for he heard Maggie's shrill pipe of welcome.

Then Bishop was shambling towards him. He was making for the odd contraption of boxes which Petrella had seen behind the kitchen door. He stared at it for a moment, said in a very small, clear voice, " So you turned it off," and sat down and started to sob.

There was a squeal behind him, and Maggie came in like a small Brünhilde. The next minute she was in her father's arms. It was difficult to say which of them was comforting the other.

Petrella realized that P.C. Peters was standing behind him.

" It's a rum set-up, and no mistake," he said.

Petrella thought at first that he was referring to the human drama, but the constable was staring at the contraption of boxes behind the door.

Petrella now looked at it more closely. In the middle was a stout vulcanite handle. This was the handle he had pulled

down, thinking it was the main house-switch. One of the boxes behind it looked like the fuse-box. The other was a contraption of linked coils; which meant nothing to his uninstructed eye. From it, two heavily insulated wires ran downwards, underneath the table.

Petrella stooped, and dragged out a large cardboard carton. It was full to the brim with old photographic film.

He looked round at Bishop.

" This is beginning to make sense at last," he said. " Were you planning to burn the shop down? " He added hastily, " I ought to warn you—"

" Don't worry about that," said Bishop. " There's only one thing I want you to understand. I wouldn't have hurt a hair of Maggie's head. I'd go to gaol rather."

" Don't go upsetting him now," said Maggie. She still looked ready to do battle.

Petrella remembered the makeshift bed and the two thin blankets.

" Where did you go to bed tonight, Maggie? "

" Like I told you, at Aunt Tucker's. I've got a blue eiderdown and sheets and pillows."

" Then what were you doing in the street? "

" You don't listen," said Maggie. " I was coming back here to fetch Teddy."

Petrella said slowly to Bishop, " You planned to set fire to this shop. You cleared this kid off to her aunt's for the night, and then put on an act at the Mill to get yourself arrested and give yourself an alibi. This set-up here was designed to look like something started by a short-circuit in the fuse-box."

Another thought occurred to him.

" I suppose Gauner fixed it all up for you. He's an electrician, isn't he? "

" He's my brother," said Bishop.

" Where is he? "

" Uncle G took me to Aunt Tucker's," said Maggie. " He had his luggage with him. You won't see him again. He's going away. Going over the sea."

Petrella stared stupidly at his watch. It was nearly two o'clock.

" I want that address," he said, " and I want it quick."

Bishop hesitated, and then said, " It's my sister by marriage. She lives at 46 Benham Street. She knows nothing about any of this, mind you."

" All right," said Petrella. " Can you stay here, Peters, and keep an eye on things? If I'm right, Gauner's on the job at this moment. If he dumped his luggage at this house in Benham

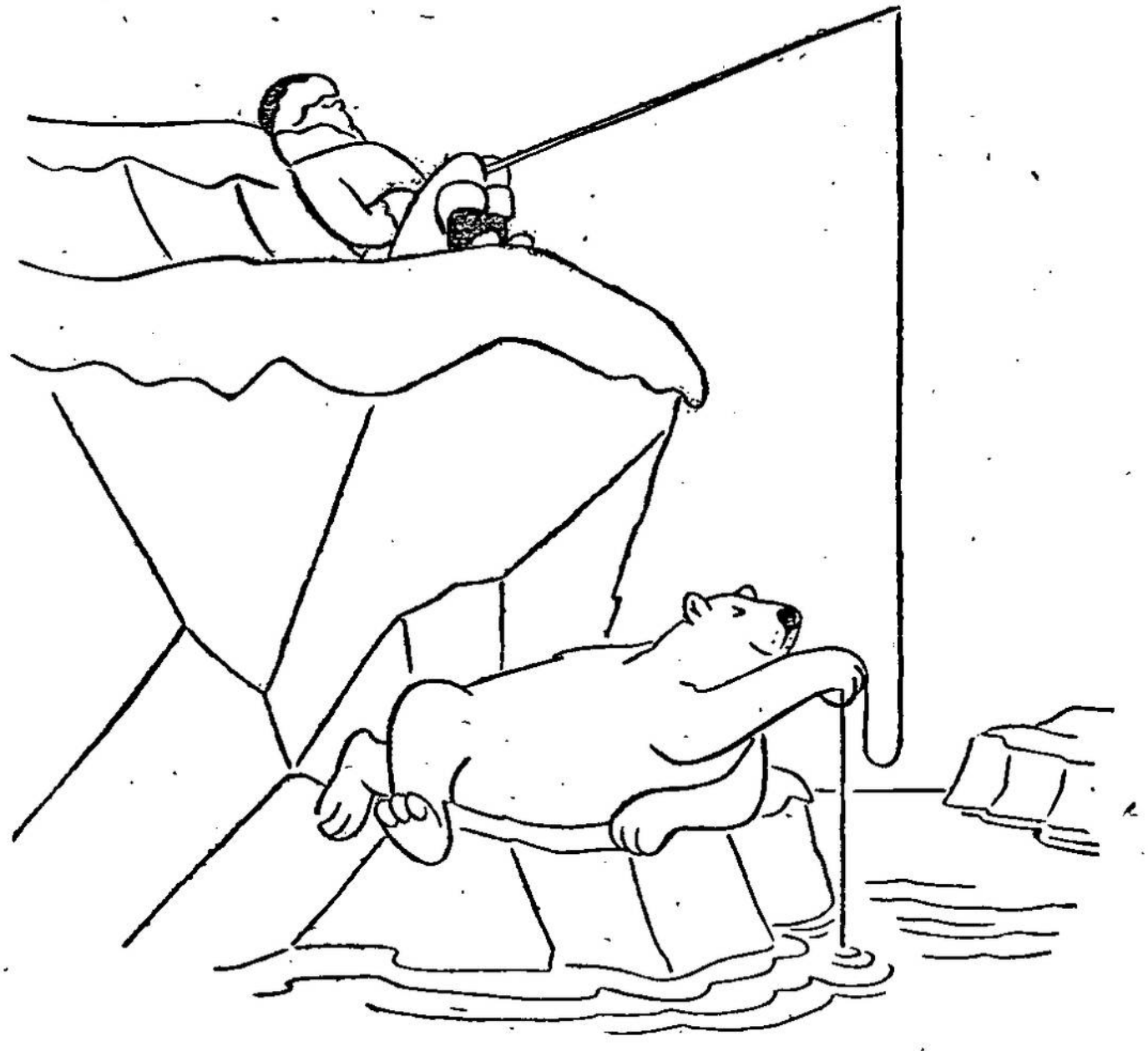
Street, he'll be coming back for it soon. I've got some telephoning to do."

It was four o'clock when the great Gauner came softly out of the early-morning mist and padded up the front path of No. 46 Benham Street, a heavy satchel hanging from his shoulder. He had every reason to feel pleased with his night's work, for the contents of the most important of the three strong-boxes in Bembridge's Safe Deposit were neatly stowed in the satchel; and the early-morning train from Liverpool Street should get him to Harwich before Bembridge's opened in the morning.

He let himself quietly into the back kitchen where he had deposited his two suitcases with the cleverly concealed false compartments.

Before he could touch the switch, the light came on and Superintendent Haxtell said genially, " I wouldn't bother to run away. There are lots more of us in the garden. That's right. Take it easy."

He, too, had every possible reason to feel pleased with the night's work.



★ *That endearing old reprobate Uncle Silas lets Argosy into the secret of one of his most mellow and fruity adventures—an enchanting new story.*

QUEENIE WHITE

BY H. E. BATES

THE name of Queenie White was hardly ever mentioned in our family, except of course by my Uncle Silas, who was inclined to mention it rather frequently.

"Now that were the year when me and Queenie—"

"We don't want to hear it, thank you, we don't want to hear it, we don't want to hear it!"

"Now wait half a jiff," Silas would say. "If you can hold your horses I were only going to say as that were the year we had snow in July—"

"We know all about it, thank you. We know all about it. We know *all* about it."

The trouble was that everyone else except myself seemed to know all about it and it was not until one September afternoon many years later that I was able to clarify the mystery of the unmentionable Queenie White and what she had done, if anything, to make her name resound so unspeakably in the ears of the women of my family.

That afternoon I walked over to see my Uncle Silas, taking with me a drop of something I thought would please his palate, and as we sat in the garden, in the drowsy wasp-laden air, under a big tree of Blenheim apples, he turned to me and said, "This is a drop o' good, boy. Red currant, ain't it?"

I said that it was red currant and he rolled another mouthful of it over his thick red tongue before saying, "It's a bit sharper'n elderberry and it ain't so flowery as cowslip, but it's proper more-ish all the same. Proper more-ish."

A moment later he started to look very dreamy, as he always did in the act of recollecting something far away, and said, "You know the last time I tasted red currant? It's bin about forty years agoo—over at The Cat and Custard Pot, at Swineshead." He gave one of those ripe, solemn pauses of his. "Wi' Queenie White."

It was always a good thing not to hurry my Uncle Silas in the matter of these more distant recollections and I did not say a word. I poured him another glass of red-currant wine instead, and after some moments he picked up the glass and gazed softly through the pure bright wine, an even purer and sharper crimson than the half-transparent, polished currants themselves had been, and said, " Yes. She kept The Cat and Custard Pot, or any road she and her husband did."

I said I was surprised to hear that Queenie White was married, but he said blandly, " Oh yis. Married all right. Well, that is if you could call Charley White a man. He were more like a damn bean-pole with a boiled egg stuck on top."

I must confess that I was not as interested in the appearance of Charley White as in what a woman called Queenie could possibly look like, but there was no hurrying my Uncle Silas, who shook his head in slow disgust and suddenly let out one of those rare-flavoured rural words of his. " Maungy," he said. " That 's what he were, Charley White. Maungy. A maungy, jealous man."

I don't suppose you are ever likely to find the word maungy in any dictionary but the effect it gives is, I think, a very expressive one. You get the impression of something between mingy and mangy and I knew at once, in this case, that Charley White could only have been a mean, moody misery of a man.

" Wuss'n a chapel deacon," my Uncle Silas said. " Allus countin' the ha'pence and puttin' a padlock on the fardens. If it hadn't been for Queenie the pub'd never ha' sold a ha'poth o' home-brewed to a stray tom-cat in a month o' Sundays."

By this time I was more eager than ever to hear what Queenie White had looked like, but my Uncle Silas said, " Yis, an' a lot older'n her, too. Perhaps he'd told her the tale pretty well and she thought he'd got money but I be damned if I know how she ever got married to that streak o' horse— Well, never mind, she were, poor gal, and she had to put up wi' it."

Then: " Or any road she did till she met me."

In the very expressive pause that followed I had a moment of recollection myself and said, *Jalous he was and heeld her narwe in cage, For she was wilde and yong and he was old.*

" What was that you jist said? " my Uncle Silas asked sharply.

" That was a bit of poetry, about a carpenter and his wife. By a man named Chaucer. It made me think of Queenie White."

" Chaucer? " he said. " Any kin to old Blunderbuss Chaucer over at Stanwick woods? He were a rare old poachin' man."

" No," I said, " this Chaucer was a long way before your time."

" Then he must have been a fly 'un," my Uncle Silas said.

He took another drink of red-currant wine, afterwards

brushing the back of his hand across his wet red lips, and then went on to tell me how, in her narrow cage, where even the farthings were padlocked, Queenie White did all the work, attracted all the customers, and never had a night's fun or day's outing from one year's end to another.

" Very sad gal, Queenie," he said. " Proper un'appy."

" You might tell me what she looked like," I said.

" Queenie? Big," he said. " Very big gal." He licked his lips slowly. " And when I say big I don't mean ugly big." He lowered his voice a fraction. " I mean beautiful big."

The wine, I thought, was beginning to inspire him now and he went on: " You've 'eerd talk o' gals with them titty little waists what you can get your two hands round? Well, Queenie'd got a waist like a big sheaf o' corn—summat big and strong you could git holt on. Solid. And legs an' arms like a mare. And upstairs—"

Here he glanced, I thought, at the upstairs windows of the house, as if thinking that someone might be looking down on us from there, but instead he was really preparing, as I heard a moment later, to complete the description of Queenie White.

" Beautiful bosom," he said. " Like a winder ledge. You could a' laid a bunch o' flowers on it easy as pie."

This charming picture of the upper parts of Queenie White's figure brought her fully to my mind's eye at last, except for one thing.

" What colour hair? " I asked him.

He seemed for a moment uncertain, I thought, about the colour of Queenie White's hair, and he paused for several moments longer, pondering on it.

" If I was to tell you it was just about the colour of the sand that day we nipped off to the sea," he said at last, " that'd be about as near as I could git to it."

" The sea? "

" Yis," he said, " the sea. We done a bunk together."

He ruminated a little more on this, stooping down after som moments to pick up a big fallen apple from the grass. After he had polished this apple on his corduroy trousers he held it up to me, clenching it hard in his hands.

" She were as firm as that there apple," he said. " Beautiful an' firm. No, she wadn't one o' them Skinny Lizzies, Queenie, all gristle and bone and suet. They didn't call her Queenie for nothing—and I tell you, boy, that's what she looked like. A red-'eaded queen."

All this, I thought, was so interesting that I poured him another glass of red-currant wine. And again, before drinking, he held

it up to the light of the clear September afternoon. All the ripeness of late summer floated down through it, pouring onto his crusty hands a tender crimson glow.

" What I can't a-bear is a man what's maungy," he said. " A man what's jealous. I see that gal a-workin' night an' day there and him a-lockin' the fardens up and skinflintin' over every pint o' beer and a-fiddle-faddlin' over how many matches in a box. God A'mighty, I believe he grudged breathin' too often—he hated wastin' 'is breath. He even grudged her peelin' the skin too thick off a tater. Yis! God's truth, I be dalled if he didn't measure a tater skin one day. Told her it was too thick to give to pigs! "

You didn't often see my Uncle Silas in a state of anger, but suddenly he lifted the apple and threw it violently across the garden, where it burst on the pigsty door. " That's what I'd a'like to ha' done to 'im," he said. " Throwed 'im up against the 'ugsty. Instead o' that I said to myself, ' Silas,' I said, ' you're a-goin' to give that there young gal one day in her life as she'll never forgit if she lives till bull's-noon.' "

It was June, he said, when they did their bunk together. They waited until the long, bald, jealous bean-pole of a husband had gone off to market one Wednesday—" allus went skinflintin' off to market of a Wednesday wi' a couple of rabbits or a hare or a brace o' birds some old poacher had brought in to swap fer a pint —allus on the mek-haste, never ettin' on 'em, nó blamed fear, not Charley "—and Silas could drive her to the station in a trap.

That day she was wearing a big white hat with an ostrich feather that she hadn't worn since the day she was married and a mauve-coloured coat with big black buttons and frogs across the front. I imagined her to look splendidly gay and fresh and excited: exactly, as Silas said, like a queen.

The bunk, he was careful to explain several times, was only for the day.

" I wanted her to 'ave jist one damn good day she'd allus remember," he said. " Hang about Charley. Hang about the old tits a-gossipin'. Hang about whether she was a married woman. Hang about the consequences. Dammit! What the 'Anover are wé 'ere for? Not to be maungy old narrer-gutses like Charley White, I tell you! We're dead a long time."

If there had been another apple at hand at this moment he would, I believe, have hurled that too at the pigsty door.

" Sea was beautiful," he said. " She'd never seen the sea afore. Couldn't credit it. Beautiful blue. Beautiful an' calm. Beautiful sand. She couldn't credit it. We lay there aside of a

big sand dune very nearly all day a-starin' at it. And then— "

He broke off and in the long expectant pause that followed I saw that his glass was almost empty. I started to fill it up again and then noticed that, for once, he was hardly watching me. His eyes were resting softly on the September distances, as if he were actually staring at the sea.

" Then what? " I said.

" Then she done summat terrible onexpected," he said. He drank, wiping his mouth. I waited, and again he shook his head.

" Wouldn't go home," he said.

He stared thoughtfully into his glass, putting it slowly down. " Couldn't turn her," he said. " Wouldn't budge. Couldn't git round her nohow."

I at once pointed out that he had, after all, got round her easily enough to do the bunk in the first place, and he readily agreed that this was so.

" Yis, but that were when she were *low*," he said. " It's easy to git round 'em when they're low. But arter a day at the sea wi' me she were a different woman."

I said that I did not doubt at all that any woman would be.

" Arter all," he said, " if you turn a nag out into a medder where the grass is sweet it ain't likely he's a-goin' back all that eager to eat chaff and wezzles in a stable, is it? "

I agreed. " But what did you do? "

" Had to give in to the gal," he said. " Dall it, it were awk'ard though."

It had never been a particularly remarkable feature of my Uncle Silas's character, I thought, to find such situations awkward, but in this case he was very quick to enlighten me.

" For one thing I hadn't got the money," he said. " I'd on'y come out fer the day."

" I'm sure that worried you," I said. " How much longer did you stay? "

" Best part of a fortnit."

" On whose money? "

" Her'n," he said. " Or rather it were Charley's. She'd been fly enough to bring it with her."

It now began to be borne upon me why the name of Queenie White had been, for so many years, an unspeakable one in our family.

" It were uncommon awk'ard," my Uncle Silas said. " But arter a few days I started to git used to it."

Remembering Queenie White's waist that was like a sheaf of corn, her limbs that were like a mare's, and her splendid bosom on which you might have laid a bunch of flowers, I did not think

that getting used to it could, after all, have been very difficult.

"Then the money run out."

"Made quite a difference, I suppose?" I said.

He pondered. "Well, it did in a way," he said, "but not half so much difference as Charley White did when he turned up."

He took a rapid drink, as if fortifying himself, and I filled up his glass again.

"I wisht you could ha' seen that there fight, boy," he said. "It were a proper stack-up. Me a little 'un and 'im that long thin streak o' goat's— Boy, it were a proper rare 'un, that were."

I filled up my own glass this time and urged him on with murmurs of approbation.

"First he hit me with a pint pot," my Uncle Silas said. "Well, I'd be damned if I were a-standin' that, so I hit 'im wi' one. Then he fetched me a couple o' rip-tearing snorters across the chops and I hit him one in the bread basket. Then he blacked my eye and I blacked one of his'n back again. After that I dunno what he did hit me with. It felt like a damn cannon-ball or summat and I started sailing down the Milky Way. When I come round—"

The admission that my Uncle Silas had been laid out quite startled me, but not nearly so much as the fact that he suddenly started roaring with laughter. "You never see anything so damn' funny in your life, boy." He took a deep swig of wine and slapped his other hand down on his knee.

"What was going on?" I said.

"Queenie were givin' '*im* a good hidin'," he said. "Ah, an' it were a good 'un, too! I told you how big an' strong she was. Well, she was a-mowin' into 'im like a Irishman a-mowin' into a forty-acre field o' barley."

"Pleasant sight," I said.

"Not fer 'im it wadn't," he said. "When she'd finished with 'im he looked as if he'd been through a mangle back'ards. He were a-layin' flat on 'is back sayin', 'No, Queenie, no, please, that's enough o' that!' and she were a-wipin' the floor with 'im. And then when it were all over she picked 'im up and dragged 'im off like a rabbitskin."

"Home?"

"Home," he said.

"And did you," I said, "go on seeing her after that?"

"Course they was a big scandal," he said. "You bet your breeches they was. All the old tits were a-twitterin' an' a-gossipin' an' a-maunderin' about it fer years. Couldn't stop talkin' about it. Loved it. Couldn't forgit it. Just their drop."

"But did you—"

" Oh yis, I used to see her," he said. " Used to see her quite often. She got out a good deal arter that, happy as you like, when she liked and how she liked. Oh yis, she was a free woman arter that. She were boss arter that."

Pondering on the word free, I found it difficult to phrase what was in my mind. Running away with another man's wife was, it seemed to me, not altogether a light affair and what I wanted to know was if my Uncle Silas perhaps—

" I know what you're a-thinkin'," he said. " You're a-wonderin' if me an' Queenie— Well, we never. She were a good girl arter that. The only thing was . . ."

" Yes? " I said.

" I used to take her a bunch o' flowers sometimes of a Sunday," he said. He slowly lifted his glass, staring through it, and I saw once again how the red glow of it poured onto his crusty hand a tender pool of light. About us, under the tree, the air was full of the hum of wasps as they worked among the fallen September apples, and for some moments longer his voice was hardly louder than the sound of wings as he described for me how Queenie White would hold the flowers to her face, rest them on her splendid bosom, and talk briefly of the beauty of the sea.

Suddenly he clasped my hand in his own oyster-crusty palm.

" Mek the most on it while you can, boy," he said. " Take a tip from Silas—mek the most on it while you can."

He stared with dreamy contemplation at the last of his wine.

" Course she's dead now," he said. " Bin dead a good while. But I often wonder whether I shall see her—you know, up there. That's if I ever goo."

" You'll go," I said.

" I ain't so sure," he said: " But I know one thing—there ain't a better-lookin' gal up there."

With that certain air of sadness that sometimes overlaid his devilry he once more contemplated the soft September distances, raised his glass, and then blessed the name of the woman whose waist was like a sheaf of corn and on whose queenly bosom you could have laid a bunch of flowers.

" Mek the most on it while you can, boy," he said. " Mek the most on it while you can."

★ ★ ★

INDICATIVE MOOD

There is more variety in the hundred and one moods of a husband than in a hundred and one lovers all in the same mood.

HELEN ROWLAND

Quire of Seraphim

An Infant lay within a shed,
Where ox and ass were tied and fed;
Hard by there stood a Maiden mild,
Saint Mary, Mother to the Child.

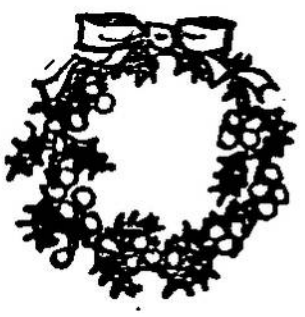
Shepherds, when they thereof heard say,
Anon with gladness went their way
To Bethlem; when they found Him there,
That noble Child, full fain they were.

A bright star at the self-same tide
Was by the three good kings espied:
Afar from Eastern land they fare;
A goodly present each doth bear.

Before yon Babe, of high degree,
They kneel and pray on bended knee,
Presenting gifts in reverence,
Of gold, and myrrh, and frankincense.

With voices sweet in awe to Him
There sung a Quire of Seraphim,
"Praise, worship, glory," loud they cry,
"To God whose kingdom fills the sky."

Traditional



CHRISTMAS MIRACLE

Such a thing as this
the Indians had never seen before

BY PAUL GALLICO

THIS story was told to me when I was a boy by my great-grandmother on a Christmas night by the fire. I always believed that stories told by great-grandmothers must be so. For their old eyes look inward and they remember. Or they remember things that someone before them has remembered.

I never knew whether this was something she had heard, or perhaps read in old letters yellowing in an attic loft. I knew only that it had happened in the wilderness a long, long time ago on Christmas Eve.

When my great-grandmother told me stories, glowing pictures formed themselves in my mind, for she had the gift and punctuated her narratives with alert and vigorous gestures. She had the power to make me hear sounds and even capture a whiff of long-forgotten odours.

On that pine- and sugar-scented night when we forgathered in the parlour, her voice was crisp and dry like the crunch of the snow-shoes on the feet of the Indian scouts she told about, rasping over the hard crust of week-old snow in the dark forest of the wilderness, as they made their way northward by a last-quarter moon with their three captives, the man, the woman, and the infant.

She made me see the file proceeding along the beaten forest trail, where the moonlight, breaking through the treetops, cast blue shadows on the snow and distorted the forms of the Algonquin raiding party, hulking in their furs of beaver and muskrat, causing them to loom even more huge and monstrous than they were. I could smell the rancid fetor of the Indians against the cold freshness of snow on spruce and pine, the leathery odour of buckskin, and the rich animal hair of the pelts they wore against the December cold.

Occasionally there was the thunder of a slip of snow disturbed from a laden branch, the clash of a steel axe-head against musket

butt, and the heartbreaking moans of the woman, who had been roughly handled. The Indians did not try to maintain silence for it was impossible in the winter forest. They relied upon swiftness to take them out of reach of any pursuing parties of Iroquois bent on rescue or vengeance.

Darker than the forest aisles was the agony of the man, Jasper Adams, because of the disaster that had overtaken them early on that morning of December 24, 1752. He and his wife and child were being rushed as swiftly as they were able to travel, northward into Algonquin territory where torture and certain death awaited them. Jasper's ire, which surmounted the stabbing pain of the wound he had suffered in the futile struggle against the ambushing Algonquin, was caused by his knowledge that the catastrophe might have been avoided but for the moment's heedlessness and disobedience of his wife, Dorcas.

Darkly and sternly, the tall man looked at her now as she marched at his side, stunned and mute, with eyes for no one but their fourteen-month-old first-born, Asher, wrapped in a blanket and slung carelessly over the shoulder of the Indian stalking the trail ahead of her.

How often, Jasper thought, he had warned Dorcas against leaving the child unattended even for a moment, and the door to their stout log cabin unbarred, when it was necessary for him to be absent or only out of sight.

It was unusual for the Algonquin to attack in December in those days, particularly in good weather when they could not count upon new snowfall to obliterate their trail. Yet that winter the alarming westward spread of the English threatening the Ohio Valley decided the French upon the political necessity of terrorism to stem the flow, and they sent surprise raiding parties, burning farms and carrying off captives to torture and death.

Now such a party was returning in single file through the moonlit woods. Quanta-wa-neh, the leader, and fat Nyagway, the Seneca renegade who spoke English, marched at the head, with the captives in the centre.

As Jasper Adams regarded his wife stumbling along the snowy trail—close to the point of exhaustion from shock, fear for the child, and the rough handling to which she had been subjected—his choler vanished. He saw that she was growing weaker, in spite of the occasional rest periods Quanta-wa-neh allowed during the march. Overwhelming love and pity replaced anger as he read the anguish in her eyes fixed upon the child.

It touched Jasper's heart, how haggard the tragedy had turned her delicate dark beauty that had been his delight, and he suddenly remembered her as she had looked, stepping off the

packet from New York onto the dock at Albany where he had awaited her.

She had been so young—so tenderly young and beautiful and fragile—when she had come forward and so sweetly and trustingly laid her hand, clad in its lace mitten, into his own, horny and calloused from ten years of fighting and farming in the wilderness. And she had said so simply, " I am here, Jasper."

His heart had clamoured with joy at the manner of her giving herself to him. Yet at the same time he had been filled with forebodings. Dared he take one so young and unaccustomed to hardship into the wilderness to hew out a home? She had arrived in New York from England only six months before, the daughter of a merchant who, having established himself in the New World, had sent for his family. It was there Jasper had met her and they had fallen in love.

And then the sight of Dorcas, so young, eager, and yielding, placing her confidence and trust in him, had given rise to a surge of courage and manhood in him, cancelling his doubts and replacing them with faith in himself and his God.

They were married in Albany, and the next day they set out for the north-western section of New York, not far from the St. Lawrence River and the French-Canadian border.

Like so many women of those times, Dorcas had shown an astonishing resilience and fortitude when faced with hardship. She had worked with him side by side as he built their home and cleared his land; she had borne him a son and had filled the role of pioneer wife.

It was perhaps this unexpected core of steel beneath the sweet and fragile flesh that had made Jasper forget how young she was, and that, despite her facing up to the trials of a life hewn out of the virgin forests, she was still a gay, irrepressible child of twenty who thought herself more mature than she was and, in a womanly way, wiser and older than her stern and experienced husband . . .

Jasper's anger evaporated before the warmth of the love he felt for her. Now that he saw her a tragic victim it was as though he had never before known what love was, and he castigated himself bitterly for bringing one who was so young and seemingly fragile to such a rough life in such a savage land, and now to such a bitter end.

The child's head emerged from the blanket, his face wrinkled up to cry. Dorcas reached for him and was roughly pulled back by an Algonquin. When Jasper tried to intervene, an Indian struck him savagely in the back with the butt of his musket.

Dorcas turned her eyes upon her husband, whom she had failed. Her guilt-tortured mind could only look back again and

again to that morning and the memory of her disobedience; her feminine desire to prepare for the coming Christmas had been their undoing.

That bright, clear, sunny morning Jasper had gone off into the woods to try to shoot a turkey for their dinner, and again admonished her to caution. With a smile of fond indulgence for his endless warnings, she had watched him cross the clearing and vanish into the forest. They had lived there for over a year now without so much as a sight of an Indian, except the friendly Iroquois who traded with them or carried news or messages.

The day had been so fine, the sun from the cloudless sky so warm, almost like summer in the still air. She had moved Asher's crib outside the cabin, next to the pile of holly, mistletoe, and pine-cones Jasper had gathered, to let the child bask some of the winter pallor from his cheeks.

Tomorrow was Christmas, their first since the house was finished, and she bethought herself of how she might make herself attractive and please her husband on Christmas Day. On an impulse she climbed up into the attic loft where the smoked hams hung, the flitches of bacon, bags of filberts and hickory-nuts, and bundles of dried herbs. In the corner next to the heap of winter apples, she had gone delving into the horsehide box she had brought with her all the way from England, in which the treasures of her girlhood were stored.

And there she had been trapped, musing over a bit of lace and the colour of some silk ribands to go with the red of the holly berries and the white of the mistletoe, when the raiding Algonquin stormed in. With the child already in their hands, it was hopeless. She had struggled desperately and futilely as she watched their home burn. The rising column of smoke brought Jasper storming out of the woods and into the ambush. He had been severely wounded in the brief struggle.

So they moved onwards, through the snowy forest aisles pierced occasionally by the bright night, and slowly approached the end of their strength.

Jasper had no illusions that mercy was to be expected from their captor, Quanta-wa-neh, whose name he had learnt from Nyagway. Quanta was a veteran of some forty-odd years, a wiry Indian with a shrewd, not unpleasant countenance, who moved gracefully and had the quiet assurance and authority of the born leader. His command over his men was absolute. He seemed to Jasper to be animated only by the exigencies of his duties as a captain and by the task assigned to him by the French to bring in his prisoners alive if possible.

But this impersonal attitude, to Jasper's mind, made him all the more dangerous. The white man had thought to try to delay the march in the hope that eventual pursuit and rescue might catch up with them. But he knew that Quanta would not hesitate to kill them if he thought they were endangering the escape of his war party.

That he was correct in his estimate of Quanta was made evident when Nyagway, the Seneca interpreter—obese, short of breath, and looking more Eskimo than Indian as he peered with beady eyes out of a cloak of muskrat fur—came waddling like a bear from the head of the line to speak to him.

Jasper was aware that Nyagway was not unfriendly to them, having defected to the Algonquin only in the hope that his knowledge of English would bring him a sinecure with the French. Instead, with the contempt that Indians have for a turncoat, the Algonquin took him on difficult and dangerous missions such as this, for which he was physically unsuited.

Now he interpreted his leader's message: "Quanta say you go faster or you, woman, and young one die now."

Jasper glanced at Nyagway out of eyes glazed with pain. "I will try." Then he uttered aloud a prayer: "O Lord! Thou art my staff and support in time of need. Give me the strength."

Nyagway regarded the white man for an instant, but without hostility, and then waddled unhappily back to his position. Forcing himself to renewed effort, Jasper quickened his pace. And the line moved still more swiftly through the forest, to carry out the cruel and horrid paradox the Indians had set their prisoners: march more quickly, lest you die now, so that you may the faster reach the place where you will die.

The command and its irony had penetrated to Dorcas, likewise. Weak as she was, she now tried to support her husband, moving him afresh to self-reproach, and love for her. He said gently, "No, no! Save your strength. It will be needed."

She murmured in despair, "Would it not be better if they killed us now?"

Jasper spoke to her then of the only real hope that he had entertained since their capture. "No. We must do their bidding. If we succeed in reaching their country, they may adopt the child into the tribe when—when we are gone; and thus he will live . . ."

She tried to quicken her pace, knowing now that the life of her son, even if they died, depended upon her not faltering, but she felt that she was close to the end of her resources. Soon she became light-headed and her mind wandered.

They marched for an hour but the speed did not suit Quanta.

The way darkened for a moment as they passed beneath a canopy of great conifers that closed out the light from both moon and stars. The sobbing of the woman and the whistling breath of the stricken man reached the leader's ears and decided him. He said briefly to his second in command, "At the next halt we will kill them."

They reached an opening in the forest, a glade made by some ancient vagary of the wind strewing the oak seeds so that the great trees grew in a circle open to the sky. Into this glade the moonlight poured down upon the snow, illuminating the most extraordinary sight, as though by a shaft streaming from an opening in Heaven itself.

Quanta heard the swift rustle at his side that told him his lieutenant had plucked an arrow from his quiver, notched it to the bowstring, and drawn it to his ear, for here was meat. Yet he held up his arm in warning, came to a halt, and whispered, "Stay your hand. For such a thing as this I have never seen before."

There were three fallow-deer in the glade, a buck, its noble antlers not yet shed, a doe, and her fawn. All three were kneeling in the snow, facing towards the east, hind legs erect, their forelegs crumpled beneath them. The young one was huddled close to its mother. The Algonquin lowered his bow and grunted, "Hau! See, it is a fawn born out of season."

The three gentle beasts remained kneeling in this manner and did not stir or take fright when the Indians formed a semicircle at the edge of the dark forest, marvelling at the strange spectacle, nudging one another and pointing with their fingers like children.

To Jasper Adams, sorely injured and close to the end of even his indomitable will to survive, there seemed something familiar in this strange sight. It seemed to him that he was a boy once more, hearkening to his mother's voice as she repeated to him the Christmas story of the Nativity of Bethlehem, and the legends that surrounded the simple and touching story told by Luke.

And as he stared with swimming eyes, it seemed to him that beyond the mysterious deer, beneath a towering tree at the glade's edge, there was a primitive cradle such as he himself had once built of willow branches for his son. In it lay a swaddled child, and cradle and child were surrounded by a glow that came from neither the moon nor the stars . . .

Then he likewise knelt in the snow, crying to his wife, "Ah Dorcas! Kneel thou, too! For it is midnight of the Eve of Christmas when Jesus was born, and the beasts of burden and

the wild things of the field and forest bend the knee to worship and adore Him, and are given the power of speech to pray."

Dorcas had taken her child from the Algonquin who was too amazed to resist and, cradling it in her arms, holding it tightly to her breast, she likewise knelt. Her lips moved but her eyes were blinded by tears.

Then Jasper Adams, with no thought to themselves or their plight, prayed a welcome to the Child. " Gentle Jesus, come to be our Saviour, we worship Thee and praise Thee, and adore Thee. Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill towards men . . . "

Quanta was mystified and impressed. For he had both dealt the man his wound and performed the rough surgery on it, and he knew the agony induced by his position. He said to Nyagway, " Ask him what is the meaning of this."

Nyagway did so. Jasper Adams replied only, " Hush! Kneel and pray likewise. This is the hour of the birth of the Son of Man."

The Indians remained standing, uneasily. The antlered buck now heaved itself slowly to its feet, followed by the doe and fawn, and remained standing there, in the centre of the glade, motionless and unafraid. The moon cast their three shadows onto the snow and the watchers could see the glistening of the dark moist muzzles and the shining of their great liquid eyes.

To Dorcas it seemed as if they had spoken and she had heard, and the words burnt themselves like fire through her brain. For yet another moment the buck remained thus standing and, to Jasper Adams, its proud penetrating glance appeared to be directed at him, piercing him to the marrow, as though communicating a shared experience. Then slowly the beast turned and, followed in single file by its doe and fawn, trotted across the glade and vanished into the darkness of the forest beyond, leaving the circle empty of all but the moonlight.

Quanta with a shudder said to Nyagway, " Ask him what is this magic. To what manitou does he pray? "

Nyagway translated. Jasper Adams endured the torment of regaining his feet. But Dorcas, lacking the strength, remained kneeling in the snow, rocking her child.

" To the Lord God and His only begotten Son Jesus Christ, who was born on this Holy Night to save the sinners of the world."

Quanta was puzzled. " But what of the deer that knelt? " he asked. " Is there a tale? "

Jasper Adams said to Nyagway, " Tell him ay."

Quanta instructed: " Order him that we would hear it now."

It was the time for the rest period. The Indians, like children, disposed themselves in a circle, squatting cross-legged in the snow with Nyagway in the centre, his fat features placid. For the moment, Quanta had forgotten his death sentence.

Jasper Adams, his hands freed, stood swaying, fighting to hold himself erect, struggling to remember through the fog of pain his Testament and childhood teachings. He began: "A new star appeared in the sky over Bethlehem on such a night as this, nigh on two thousand years ago, one never before seen by any man."

The encircling Indians, listening to the translation, murmured, "Hau!" and settled themselves more comfortably.

"In the east, three Wise Men were travelling. They saw the star in the heavens and knew that the King of All had been born. They turned aside and followed the star to bring Him gifts. And the shepherds in the fields tending their flocks saw the star and heard an angel and came likewise."

Nyagway, the centre of attention, was in his element. His flat features became animated, his small eyes glowed. He gestured, and his voice picked up the inflections of Jasper Adams's voice, which seemed to gain in strength and joy as he unfolded his story.

"To Bethlehem there came two travellers, Mary and Joseph, husband and wife, and Mary was big with child. But the child was not the child of Joseph, but of God, for Mary was with child of the Holy Ghost."

The listeners, even Quanta, murmured, "Hau, hau!" and nodded their heads, for this they could understand.

Dorcas Adams cradled her child and, looking upwards, saw one whose strength and courage were more than she had even dreamed. Lover and husband he had been, but now he seemed blessed by the power of God. He towered so tall that his head seemed crowned with light against the night sky, the shadows of his arms were longer than the dark branches of the spreading oaks, and his voice booming through the forest aisles was like organ music.

"When Mary's time came, there was no place for them at the inn at Bethlehem nor would any human being give them shelter. Then they went to a stable and there in the manger the Infant Jesus was born. And about His head there was such a glowing as there is in the heavens tonight."

They all followed Nyagway's gesture and looked up into the milky sky. Dorcas gazed into the face of her husband and what she saw was both tender and terrible. And so must he have appeared to the Indians likewise, for their dark shining eyes were fastened upon the towering figure with awe and something akin

even to fear. There was that about this strange story he was telling that had the power to move even them.

" And the ox bowed down to worship and gave the Infant of his soft straw for His bed. And the ass bowed down to worship and gave the Infant of her warm milk to drink. And the sheep, too, bowed down to worship and nestled close with their soft wool to keep the Infant warm." Thrice Nyagway bowed as he narrated and his audience swayed with him.

" Ever since that time the beasts of burden and all the creatures of the field and forest have been given the power of speech at midnight on Christmas Eve, and this night, as they did so long ago, they kneel to worship the Christ-child and pray to Him."

Quanta's breath was exhaled in a long, hissing sigh. " Ah. The deer! " Then he asked of Nyagway, " Were they then heard to speak? What were their words? "

When the question was put, it was Dorcas who replied, looking up into the mighty countenance of her husband.

" Ah yes, I heard them. They prayed to the Lord God and the Infant Jesus to watch over them. When the prayer was finished, the doe spoke thus to her mate, ' And after my Lord in Heaven, thou art my lord on earth. Thy ways shall be my ways and thy will my will, thy commands my law, for I am thine to do thy bidding.' "

Quanta nodded. He was himself a family man and the words pleased him. He asked, " And what became of this child? "

Jasper Adams felt his strength beginning to fail him. Nevertheless he undertook to reply, " Jesus grew up to become a great preacher. He preached that God, His Father, was our Father and the Father of all. Those who did not believe in Him or His message caused Him to be crucified. He died so that men all over the world would remember what He preached and would love and worship God their Father . . ."

Now he would have fallen, had he not clutched the shoulder of Nyagway. There occurred then a diversion that sent the party springing to its arms as two Algonquin scouts on snowshoes hurried in from a side trail and conferred with Quanta. The gist of their report was that a large force of Iroquois, with some English, was only a few hours behind.

Quanta's lieutenant gestured towards the captives. " Shall we kill them? " Quanta pondered. A word, a nod, a flashing of axe-blades in the moonlight, and he would be relieved of this danger to the security of his band. And he would have concluded the raid to the best of his ability. Yet he hesitated.

Quanta was himself deeply religious. He feared and worshipped many mysterious and unseen beings of the forest, the

skies, fire, and water, and recognized the mysterious cosmic power everywhere in nature. Now his fingers sought and touched the little medicine bundle on his person, a collection of small magical objects wrapped in an otterskin, as though he hoped for help from this source.

And as he did so, it came to him that while his own beliefs and those of the people from over the seas differed, one should not be disrespectful of strange gods and magic, and that, if this were the night of the Great Manitou of the white man, to whom even the deer bowed down in prayer, it might not be propitious to harm them. He remembered too that the Blackrobes—the priests who served the God or Great Spirit of the French, his masters—had come into the wilderness telling the story of their Great Father who was greater even than all the Algonquin spirits and manitous put together, and of the Son born to Him, called Je-su. And had he not with his own eyes seen the kneeling deer?

Thus Quanta came to his decision. To slay the captives after what had taken place would be neither polite to the gods nor politic. "Release them," he ordered. "Let them go."

To his underlings he gave a practical explanation. "The pursuers are too many for us. If they find the captives dead they will continue on our tracks. But if they come upon them alive and in need of aid, they will stop in the manner of white men and will not follow after us. Obey."

And so Quanta-wa-neh, the Algonquin, gave Jasper and Dorcas Adams their liberty as a Christmas present, but it was Nyagway, the wheezy old Seneca renegade, who gave them the gift of life.

The raiding party propped the two up against trees, re-formed swiftly, and vanished northwards. But Nyagway waited behind for a moment. He had acquired great merit that night. No longer would he be known as *He-who-Waddles-like-a-Bear*, but instead as *Teller-of-the-Great-Tale-at-Midnight*. He fumbled at his pouch for a moment; and, going across to Jasper, pressed flint and steel into his hand; then he scuttled off.

And once more Jasper Adams found some last reserve of strength, for fire meant warmth, and warmth in the winter forest was life. He crawled to collect wood and twigs, and spruce boughs for a bed for the child. When the blaze was roaring, he braced himself against the tree and held his wife in his arms.

Cradling her close to him as she had held her child, he was filled with a feeling of overwhelming tenderness and nearness, as though for the first time their souls were one. He studied the pale young face, the beloved features which moved him now more than they ever had before. Then there came to him the overwhelming fear that she might not live through the night, for

she seemed far gone. Her lips moved and he heard her repeat the prayer of the fallow-doe. "And after my Lord in Heaven, thou art my lord on earth . . . thy will, my will."

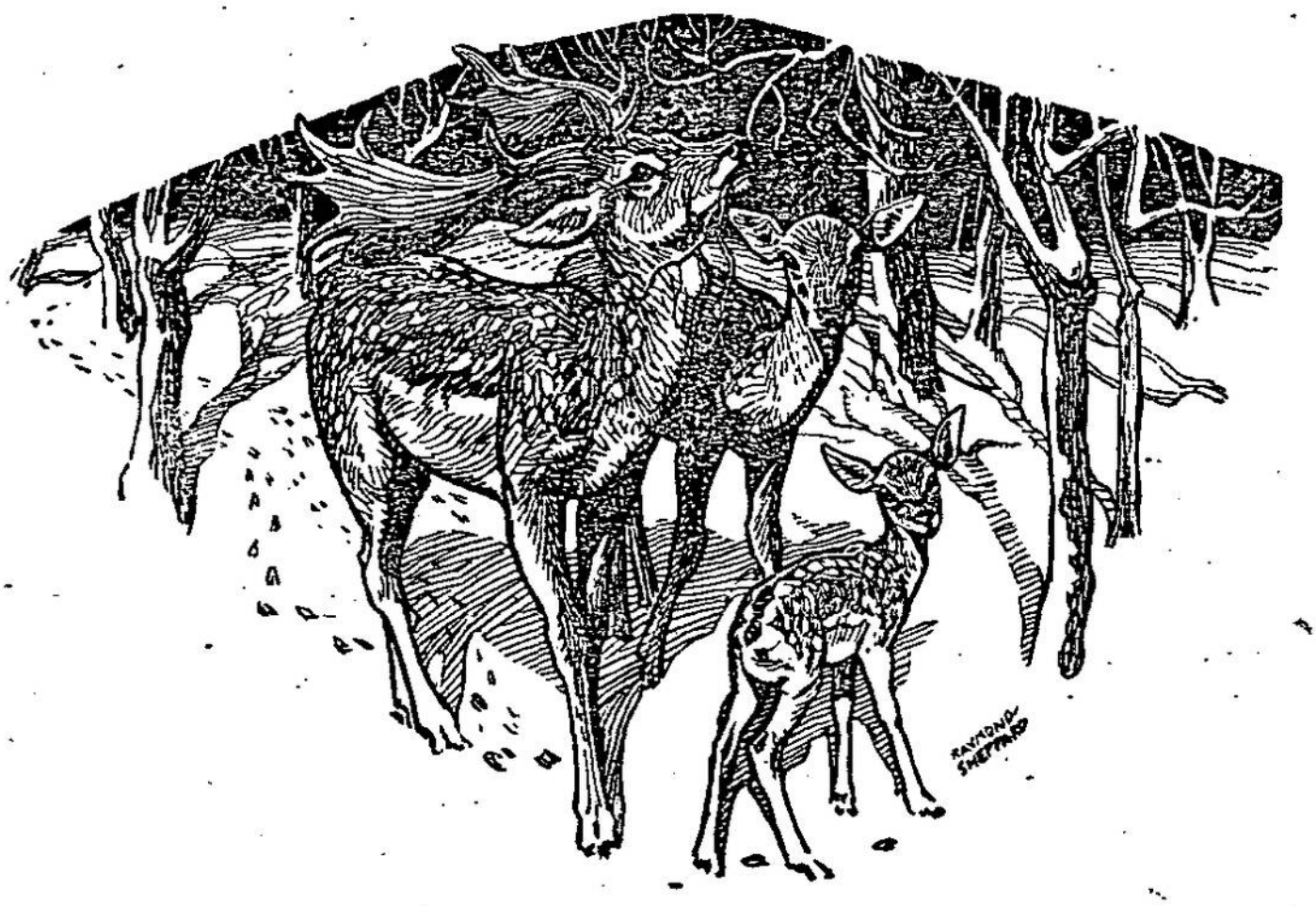
It was Christmas morning. He looked into the sky through a giant fir, its branches powdered with snow and illuminated, as if with Christmas candles, by the stars that studded the bow of the sky and seemed to lean down to trim the needled limbs. And, at the very peak of the tree, one seemed affixed there, gleaming blue-white, as bright perhaps as the strange light that had risen over Bethlehem so long ago.

Then for the first and last time in his life, Jasper Adams beseeched of his God something for himself.

"Lord God," he prayed, "forgive me for asking more of Thee this day; but what availeth the life Thou hast restored to me if Thou takest from me this woman? She is my heart and my soul. Spare her, Lord . . ."

It was not long after that there came a jingling of weapons and accoutrements, and a crashing of many men from the dark forest aisles. It was thus the rescue-party of Iroquois and British found them, the man and woman alive and safe, the fire licking the dried wood, orange against the snow, and the child Asher on his bed of boughs, awake and laughing.

This is how I remember the story told me by my great-grandmother on a snowy Christmas night by the candle-lit tree in our parlour, when I was young . . .



A present has many faces to it,
has it not ?

CHARLOTTE BRONTE, *Jane Eyre*

My love sent me a chicken without e'er a bone;
He sent me a cherry without e'er a stone;
He sent me a Bible that no man could read;
He sent me a blanket without e'er a thread.

How can there be a chicken without e'er a bone?
How can there be a cherry without e'er a stone?
How can there be a Bible that no man can read?
How can there be a blanket without e'er a thread?

When the chicken's in the eggshell, there is no bone;
When the cherry's in the blossom, there is no stone;
When the Bible's in the press, no man can it read;
When the wool is on the sheep's back, there is no thread.

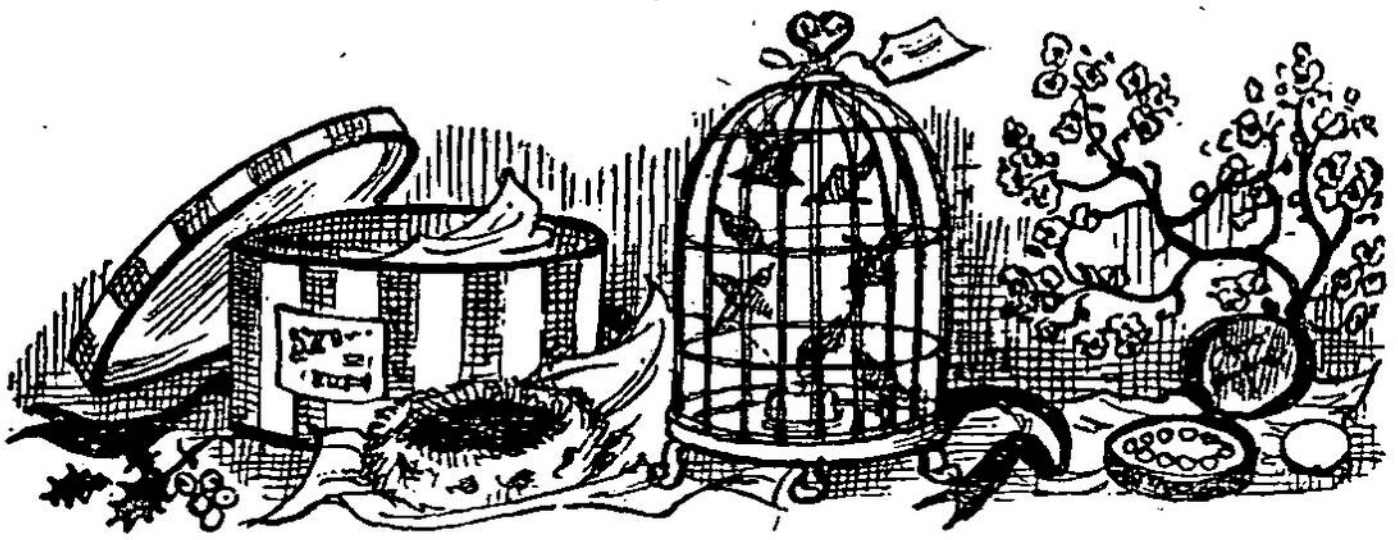
Traditional

Highly Gifted

My dear, dear Daddy,

Haven't you any sense? Don't you *know* that you mustn't give one girl seventeen Christmas presents? . . . Think how embarrassing it would be if we should ever quarrel! I should have to engage a moving-van to return your gifts. I am sorry that the necktie I sent was so wobbly; I knit it with my own hands (as you doubtless discovered from internal evidence). You will have to wear it on cold days and keep your coat buttoned up tight. Thank you, Daddy, a thousand times. I think you're the sweetest man that ever lived—and the foolishest!—JUDY

JEAN WEBSTER, *Daddy-Long-Legs*



Bought for a Song

Carol-singing at Christmas was the greatest pleasure of all, and the most profitable . . . We looked to Christmas-time as our chief opportunity of making money on a more generous scale . . . We ended up the Christmas tired and pleased, with hoarse throats, but plenty of oranges, dates, chocolates and sweets. We made sometimes 12s. 6d., sometimes 15s., and once something short of a pound. I determined to buy mother a present; went into a ladies' shop, and with some confusion, asked the price of a black-and-white silk scarf. I had expected it to be 10s. at the most. It was 15s. 6d. Inwardly horrified, but too shy and proud to retreat, I bought it: practically all my carol-singing money vanished at one go! However the scarf still exists; it was evidently good value.

A. L. ROWSE, *A Cornish Childhood*

On the fifth day of Christmas my true love sent to me,
Five gold rings, four colly birds,
Three french hens, two turtle doves, and
A partridge in a pear tree.

The Twelve Days of Christmas

Free and Easy

" Candy and flowers, dear," Ellen had said time and again, " and perhaps a book of poetry or an album or a small bottle of Florida water are the only things a lady may accept from a gentleman . . . Never any gift of jewelry or wearing apparel, not even gloves or handkerchiefs. Should you accept such gifts, men would know you were no lady and would try to take liberties."

" Oh, dear," thought Scarlett, looking first at herself in the mirror and then at Rhett's unreadable face. " I simply can't tell him I won't accept it. It's too darling. I'd—I'd almost rather he took a liberty, if it was a very small one."

MARGARET MITCHELL, *Gone With the Wind*

Blossoming Tree

Too many things to remember.
I shall forget
Whether I did, in fact, kiss you,
The date that we met,
But the blossoming tree that you sent
on a bleak twenty-fifth of December
I'll never forget.

Too many things to remember.
I shall forget
The shape of your mouth as you smiled
and set off for Tibet;
But the gift that you sent on that last
twenty-fifth of December
Remains with me yet.

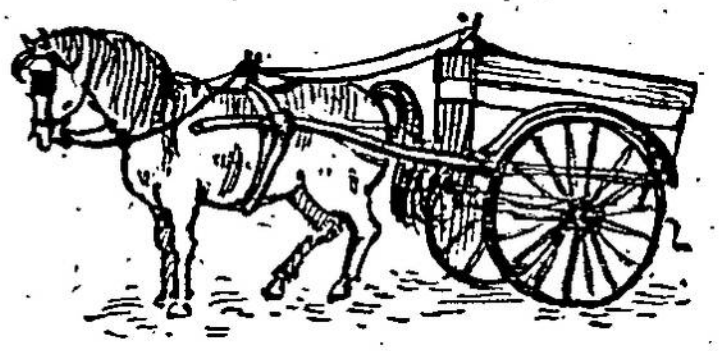
AMANDA JONES

Golden Cart

I must admit that my wicked parents turned up trumps at Christmas, and my presents from them were always the envy of the entire household. This year my mother, who was in Paris, sent a gilded bird-cage full of stuffed humming-birds which, when wound up, twittered and hopped about and drank at a fountain. She also sent a fur hat and a gold and topaz bracelet, whose glamour was enhanced by the fact that Aunt Sadie considered them unsuitable for a child and said so. My father sent a pony and cart, a very smart and beautiful little outfit, which had arrived some days before, and been secreted by Josh in the stables.

"So typical of that damned fool Edward to send it here," Uncle Matthew said, "and give us all the trouble of getting it to Shenley. And I bet poor old Emily won't be too pleased. Who on earth is going to look after it?"

NANCY MITFORD, *The Pursuit of Love*



ABODE OF LOVE

BY AUBREY MENEN

Aubrey Menen, one of the most brilliantly funny of our younger writers, can always be counted on for a fresh and startling theme. His next book, The Abode of Love, is no exception! This time he turns to Victorian England, and against that background of crinolines and convention, he tells the astonishing—and true—story of the Reverend Henry Prince.

From this intriguing novel, to be published shortly by Chatto & Windus, Argosy has chosen the hilarious episode of The Disgraceful Castaway.

In this, the Reverend Prince, happily settled with his wife Julia in lodgings at Brighton—where his religious meetings are proving an irresistible attraction to the Fair Sex—receives a surprising call from a surprising caller, ex-Sergeant Matthew Bunt of Her Majesty's Marines . . .

ONE evening, when the rain beat incessantly on the windows, a middle-aged man came in. He threw off his greatcoat, and approached Prince. He asked if he might have a word in private with him. Prince asked the man to draw a chair up to the stove, and to sit down.

In a few minutes, he was listening willingly, for Sergeant Matthew Bunt's story took him agreeably away from the rain to the sunshine of the mid Pacific.

Matthew Bunt had joined the Marines at the age of thirteen and he had risen to be a sergeant. His promotion took place in the thirty-eighth year of his life.

In the December of that year the ship in which Sergeant Bunt was sailing in the way of duty encountered a storm while some sixty leagues off the Marshall Islands. The storm, which began at six in the evening, increased in violence until midnight, when the ship struck. It was almost immediately dismasted, and her commander, judging that her situation was hopeless, gave the order to abandon ship.

This was done in as disciplined a manner as the tempest would allow, and although one boat was lost in the launching, with its complement, the others got away safely. But Matthew Bunt, while marshalling his men upon the sloping deck, slipped, and struck his head against a stanchion. The position in which he lay suggested to his comrades, who saw him only by the occasional glare of lightning, that he had broken his neck and was dead. In obedience to the commander's orders, he was left behind, there

being no way of getting his insensible body into the already crowded boats.

But Matthew Bunt was not dead. He came to at six o'clock in the morning to find the storm abated and himself alone. He refreshed himself with some brandy which he found in a cabin, and, much restored, saw that the rock on which the ship had struck lay within a mile of a small island. While he was observing this, the ship settled, suddenly heeling over still farther and sending Bunt sliding down the deck. Thus warned of the danger in which he stood, he stripped himself to his drawers, and immediately made his way down the side of the ship to clear water, into which he plunged and swam, without any great difficulty, to the shore.

The island was well wooded, but a promontory near the beach gave Bunt a clear view over the whole of it. It was little more than a mile across, and Matthew Bunt saw with relief that there were some grass huts lining the shore of an adjacent bay. But these turned out to be deserted. The huts were empty save for a few large cooking-pots and similar household objects too big to carry away. The native inhabitants, it would seem, had abandoned their village, but for what cause Bunt was quite unable to make out. Small patches of simply cultivated ground still bore fruits and edible tubers. Matthew Bunt made a meal of these, and consoled himself with the thought that the natives would return.

Two years later they had not done so, nor had the island been sighted by any ship. Meanwhile Matthew Bunt had found the climate equable, if rainy at certain seasons, and with some easily found clams, wild fruits such as the coconut, and the things that grew of their own accord in the gardens, he had eaten his fill each day. He had suffered from nothing worse than loneliness. He was a heavily built man, slow in his thoughts and actions.

In two years he had grown much fatter, and now had a paunch that hung over the belt of his tattered drawers, and cheeks which shook. While his spirits had sometimes been low, especially at night, he had never given way to despair. He was confident that he would be rescued because he felt certain that he was not castaway on an altogether-unvisited island.

His hopes of rescue had been much buoyed by finding, early on, a cache containing a pistol, powder, a bag of sea-biscuit, a lantern, and one or two other items suitable for a castaway. It was the custom of Her Majesty's Navy at this time to leave such caches on remote islands, and to call, every so often when their duties permitted, to rescue any unfortunate who might be there.

One tranquil and brilliant morning, he was dozing under the shade of a palm tree when he was astonished to hear distant voices. Rubbing his eyes, he saw that a frigate had rounded the promontory and cast anchor. A boat, filled with men, was now rowing towards the beach.

Matthew Bunt stood up and gazed irresolutely at the spectacle. A man in the bow of the boat, observing him through a spy-glass, waved and hallo'ed. Matthew Bunt did not respond, but stood,

his arms to his sides, and his mouth slightly open. The boat beached and Matthew saw men in the uniform of Her Majesty's Navy leap out.

When, a moment later, he saw a man in a heavily laced coat step ashore, he recognized that he must be the Captain of the ship, and Bunt's old habits of discipline reasserted themselves. He walked down to the beach and when he was within a suitable distance, drew himself up and, with such dignity as his lack of clothing and his paunch allowed him, he saluted.

The master of the frigate, Captain Overton, although normally a stern and gloomy man, greeted this salute with an outstretched hand and a perceptible softening of his usually rigid features. Captain Overton was not surprised to find that tears were pouring down the castaway's cheeks.

" Sergeant Bunt," said Matthew Bunt, " of Her Majesty's Marines, in *Orion*," he said, naming his late ship.

" Stand easy, Sergeant Bunt," said the Captain, with some emotion. " I am Captain Overton, Royal Navy. You may shake hands."

The two men shook hands, and three more junior officers, following their Captain's example, also took Matthew Bunt's hand; the most junior officer of all venturing to place his left hand on the castaway's shoulder.

Matthew Bunt, the tears continuing to roll down his cheeks, said nothing. The officers waited for their Captain to speak and Captain Overton sought for words suitable for an officer to address to a sergeant of Marines in such unusual circumstances.

" You will be glad to know, my man," he said finally, " that most of your comrades got to safety."

" Yes, sir," said Matthew Bunt.

There was a lengthy silence on the sunlit beach, broken only by the gentle lapping of the waves and the calls of a few tropical birds.

" Well," said Captain Overton, at last, " since I am ashore and you are the senior rank here—but wait a bit, wait a bit! Are you alone? "

" Yes, sir."

" Good. Then you will kindly escort me to some place in the shade where I can hear your report. Ah yes. Mr. Wilkins," he said, speaking to one of the officers, " there is a case-bottle in the longboat. Give the sergeant a tot of rum."

While this was being done the Captain looked about him and studied the lie of the land. Matthew Bunt took a small mug, drained the rum, and handed the mug back in silence.

" Mr. Wilkins," said the Captain.

" Yes, sir."

" I think we might have a tot of rum all round. See to it, Mr. Wilkins, if you please. I shall meanwhile take a short stroll along the beach to offer up thanks for this deliverance."

He walked away, his hands behind his back and his hat under his

arm. At a distance of some twenty paces, he bowed his head. The officers and sailors meantime silently drank rum. After three minutes, Captain Overton clapped his hat on his head and walked briskly back. The last sailor hastily swallowed his tot, and the officers stood once more in attentive attitudes. It was clear that Captain Overton was a respected and serious man.

"Now, Sergeant," said Captain Overton briskly, and Matthew Bunt led him up to the beach where a fallen palm tree lay conveniently in some shade. The Captain seated himself and Matthew Bunt stood to attention. He was no longer weeping, but there were still tearstains on his ample cheeks.

"Stand easy, Sergeant Bunt," said the Captain. "Stand easy, my man. This may be a long business. Tell me first what you remember of what happened when *Orion* struck."

When Bunt had done this to the best of his ability and to the Captain's satisfaction, the Captain said, "Then you swam ashore?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you found the island deserted?"

"Yes, sir. There had been some natives, sir, but—"

"I know, I know, I know," said Captain Overton. "I was here four years ago. They'd already gone. By the way, did you find the cache I left for just such an eventuality as this?"

"Yes, sir. Very handy, it was, sir, if I may venture to say so."

The Captain eyed him. "Wasn't there a razor in it, Bunt?"

Matthew Bunt reddened. He rubbed his beard nervously.

"Yes, sir."

"No mirror, perhaps?"

"Not that I can recall, sir."

"I'll remember next time," said Captain Overton. He added, with some sarcasm, "We aim to do our best for the Marines, you know, Sergeant."

"Yes, sir."

"Well, never mind. And so you have been on this paradise for two years."

"About that, sir."

"Didn't you keep a calendar?"

"No, sir."

"You should have notched a pole, Bunt."

"Yes, sir. I'll remember next time, sir," said Bunt. The Captain glanced up sharply, but never was a man farther from an impertinence than Matthew Bunt. His cheeks were sagging, his lips were dry, and there was more sweat on his forehead than was justified by the morning sun.

"Did you never read *Robinson Crusoe*, Bunt?"

"My mother read it to me, sir."

"Good. Good. A fine book, Bunt. It shows what a man can do with his own two hands to overcome the most adverse fate, provided he is serious-minded and energetic. It was for years my favourite book, Sergeant. I may tell you that when I think of you here, alone, for two whole years, and of all the opportunities you

have had of testing your character and overcoming difficulties, I envy you, Bunt. I have often dreamt of living alone on an island, and only my duties as an officer have prevented me from doing so. Well, now," said the Captain, getting up, " show me round your little kingdom, Sergeant Crusoe."

The Captain, saying this, smiled for the first time since he landed. " First the stockaded hut, and the wheat patch and the goat pen, and so on. This promises to be one of the most interesting days of my life, Bunt. Forward! "

Matthew Bunt hesitated. " I'm afraid that there are no goats on the island," he said. " I'm sure I'm very sorry, sir."

" Never mind, never mind," said the Captain. " Your stockade, then, and your store-room."

" My . ... what did you say, sir? "

" The place which you've built to live in," said Captain Overton, impatiently.

" Oh yes, sir," said Bunt miserably, and he led the way along the beach, but in a most dejected manner. Nor were his spirits in any way improved to see the three officers, at a signal from Captain Overton, fall in behind with expressions as eager as that of their commander.

He led them across the beach, over a place where grasses grew among the sand, and then between some coconut palms. Among these, round a clearing, were the grass huts that the islanders had abandoned. " Here, sir," he said, desperately, " is where I live."

Like the newcomers, he looked around him. Never had the place seemed so ruined. There was not a grass wall without a gaping hole; not a roof that did not sag; and he was surprised that one man with so few possessions could cause such a litter, even if he had not swept up for two years.

" Admirable! " said Captain Overton. " Most ingenious! I would never have thought of that myself. Would you, Mr. Wilkins? "

" No, sir," said the officer smartly. Then after a suitably respectful pause. " I'm not sure, sir, that I've even thought of it now."

" Why, Mr. Wilkins, don't you see? " said Captain Overton with great animation. " Think of Robinson Crusoe. Don't you remember the great pains he took to conceal his dwelling for fear of hostile natives? Sergeant Bunt here solved the problem much more simply and put himself to no trouble at all. He just left this deserted settlement exactly as he found it."

Captain Overton swung his arm in a semicircle; the sun gleamed on the lacing of his cuff. " Who, looking at this depressing scene of utter neglect, would ever imagine that a human being lived here? A cannibal himself could not be so filthy and untidy in his habits, much less a shipwrecked Englishman. Your home, I take it," he said, turning to Bunt, " lies behind, among those bushes? "

" No, sir."

" Then where is it, where, my fine fellow? " said the Captain, with the affable air of one who confesses himself beaten in a game. " Devil take me if I can see it."

" Would you be meaning the place where I lived when I first came here, sir? "

" At any time, Bunt, at any time."

" Well, sir," said the Marine, pointing, " I lived in that house for a while."

It was the worst ruin of all. One wall stood upright, two leaned perilously, and the fourth wall, like the roof, was flat on the ground. " Then," said Bunt, licking his lips, " when that fell down one night in the wind, I moved, in a manner of speaking, sir, to the next one. As you can see, sir, the roof of that one got to be none too good and so I upped stakes, sir, as you might say, and moved to the next one, and then . . ."

The hopelessness of his position overwhelmed him. He drew a long breath and said, in the voice of a man declaring himself ready for the gallows, " My present quarters is that there, sir, the last on your left." He looked at the hut wistfully. Even although he could now see the tear in the roof, the charred wall where it had once caught fire a little, and the mud outside where he threw slops from his cooking-basin, it still had, for him, the pull on his heart-strings of home.

Captain Overton said nothing, but the muscles of his tightly clenched jaws were working. He walked to the hut, bent almost double at the low door, and went inside. There was a pause, and then with a gleam of gold braid that was almost dimmed by the flashing of his eyes, he emerged.

" Sergeant Bunt! "

Now that the worst was upon him, Bunt decided to face it like a Marine. He drew himself up to attention. He put his hands stiffly to his sides. He held up his chin. He tried to pull in his stomach but found that his muscles had lost the habit. " Yessir."

" Where have you put the things you took from the wreck? "

" I didn't take anything from the wreck, sir."

" I am speaking," said Captain Overton slowly, " with particular reference to a box of gold coin, the property of Her Majesty the Queen."

" Yes, sir. I didn't take nothing, sir."

" You swam out to the wreck? "

" No, sir."

" How long was the wreck on the rocks before it sank? "

" Three months, sir."

" And you never once swam out? "

" No, sir."

Captain Overton raised his foot and stamped hard on the ground. " God damn my eyes," he roared, " what *were* you doing with your time, then? Answer me! "

" Sitting, sir. And gathering bananas and coconuts. And eating, sir. And sleeping, of course, sir. And . . . and . . ." said

Bunt, desperately, " walking, sir. Round the island and back again."

" Nothing else? "

" Nothing much, sir."

Captain Overton gave him a long and searching look.

" Mr. Wilkins," said the Captain, " you will take Mr. Arkwright and Mr. Thompson, and you will search the huts." He then walked deliberately away and, turning his back on Bunt, he clasped his hands under his coat tails and ostentatiously stared out to sea.

Mr. Wilkins reported. " Nothing, sir," he said.

" Nothing from the ship at all? "

" No, sir. Not a button. It appears he was telling the truth. There's just native bric-à-brac and the things from the cache that I left myself, sir, on your orders."

There was a silence.

" There *is* just one thing, sir."

Bunt drew a sharp breath, but did not stir.

" Yes, Mr. Wilkins? "

" I hardly like to mention it, but it's a sort of idol, sir. In the second hut from the left."

" I'm not interested in ju-jubes, Mr. Wilkins."

" No, sir. But this ju-jube is made up, partly, of Admiralty property."

" Show me it. Bunt, follow us."

Bunt deliberately played for time. " Please, Captain, I think if you search the reef outside the lagoon, you'll find plenty of flotsam, sir. It's the reef keeps everything off, sir. I've noticed it."

" Oh, you have, Bunt. Have you visited the reef? "

" No, sir."

" And why not? "

" It seemed a long way off, sir. In this climate. I . . ."

" Here it is," said Mr. Wilkins, and he dragged out into the sunlight a large sheet of tarpaulin. Rocking to and fro on it there were two or three bundles of cloth shaped very roughly into the shape of a female body. On top of these was a wooden head, carved with care if no skill, on which was drawn, with charcoal, a face with rosebud lips. Rope, teazed out, served to represent hair.

Bunt hid his face in his hands.

" Sergeant Bunt," said the Captain.

" Yes, sir," said Bunt through his hands.

" What is this . . . this object? "

Bunt raised a ravaged face. " That, sir," he said, not without dignity, " is Lola."

" That will do, Mr. Thompson," said the Captain, as the youngest officer guffawed. " So this is Lola, Sergeant. I take it that you spent your time manufacturing this object instead of doing your duty? "

Bunt wiped his face with his hands. He braced his shoulders. " May I speak, sir? "

Captain Overton nodded.

" I'm sure you are right, sir, and I should have been doing my duty. I meant to, but somehow time slipped by and I didn't. If I'd done it, sir, I don't suppose I'd have been lonely. But I *was* lonely, sir. I wanted some company, sir. I wanted it bad."

" So you made this . . . this . . ."

" So I made Lola, sir. Yessir."

" Why did you call her Lola, Bunt? After an acquaintance of yours, perhaps? "

" No, sir. It just came to me, sir, one evening, when she was finished. ' Lola,' I said, ' Lola me girl, you and me—' "

" You talked to it? "

" Oh yes, sir. Every evening. We had long conversations, sir. I was very grateful to her, sir, after my wife died."

He said this with such feeling that all four officers looked at him in consternation.

" Was your wife aboard the ship, Sergeant Bunt? " asked Captain Overton. " I had no idea . . ." He broke off, and following the example of his junior officers, he turned to where Bunt, with a gesture eloquent of grief, was pointing. They now saw, for the first time, that behind one of the huts was an oblong plot, with a few blossoming flowers. It was the only tidy place in the vicinity.

" Hats off, gentlemen," said Captain Overton.

" Yes," said Matthew Bunt. " I had to kill her off when Lola came." Hearing Wilkins's exclamation of horror, he recollected himself. " Oh, it's not what you gentlemen think," he said reassuringly. " My wife over there's just like Lola. I made her first. I meant to go straight with her, but I dunno. It's the climate, I suppose. I started making Lola, just for a bit of variety, as you might say, and then the fat was in the fire."

Young Mr. Thompson, struggling with himself, felt that he must say something or burst. " You mean, Bunt," he said with a preternaturally solemn expression, " your wife quarrelled with Lola? " He clapped his hand over his mouth and regarded Bunt with large round eyes.

" Yes," said Bunt, simply.

" I'd be obliged to you, Mr. Thompson, if you'd leave this matter to me," said Captain Overton. " Sergeant Bunt, am I to understand that in dereliction of your duty as a non-commissioned officer of Her Majesty's Marines, instead of salvaging valuable property from the wreck *Orion*, instead of making yourself a clean, hygienic, and defensible bivouac, instead of keeping your body hardy and your hands busy, you lolled and squatted in the sunshine like an ignorant blackamoor, stuffing yourself with bananas and contriving obscene and immoral effigies? Correct me if I am wrong, Sergeant Bunt."

" It wasn't immoral at first, sir," said Matthew Bunt. " I said as how the first one was my wife."

" Are you married, Bunt? "

" You mean really married, sir? "

"I mean married, you lunatic," bellowed Captain Overton. "Is there a Mrs. Bunt, God save her perishing soul, back in England?"

"No, sir. I think p'raps, if there had been, I'd have had something to occupy my mind, like."

"But as it is, you could find nothing but—but Lola?"

"Yes, sir."

"You couldn't think by chance about your profession?"

"Profession? Oh, I see what you mean, sir," said Bunt. "Well, sir, I've been a marine, man and boy, now for twenty-five years and I can't say that thinking's ever come in my line of duty, begging your pardon, I'm sure."

"And religion, Bunt. Have you no religion?"

"Oh yes, sir. I was brought up very strict, sir."

"You were sent to church?"

"Yessir. And Sunday School, sir."

"And did none of the precepts of your pastors and masters ever cross your mind to lift it even a moment above your—your vicious games with your dolls?"

Matthew Bunt bit his lip. He shook his head.

"Would you oblige me, Bunt," said Captain Overton, "by giving an audible answer when questioned by your superior officer?"

"Yes, sir. On this island, sir, it always seemed Tuesday."

"Tuesday?"

"Yes, sir. I mean, sir, nobody thinks of religion on Tuesdays, do they, sir, not usually?"

"I have known men who think of religion every day of the week, Bunt."

"Yes, sir. But I wasn't thinking of officers, sir. I was thinking of other ranks."

Captain Overton drew a long, deep breath. "Even other ranks," he said, with a voice which shook with the effort to control himself, "have been known to address prayers to their Creator on a Tuesday when finding themselves in the dreadful situation of being abandoned on an uninhabited island."

"Oh *yes*, sir," said Bunt. "But I didn't have to worry, sir, because I found the cache which you'd so kindly left—I'm sure I'm very grateful, sir, for your forethought—and I knew that . . ."

Captain Overton interrupted him in a voice that sent the parakeets fluttering from the branches of the surrounding trees. "Are you trying to put the blame for your backsliding on *me*, you waddling heap of corruption, you?" asked Captain Overton.

"No, sir," said Bunt, but no sound came from his bloodless lips.

Captain Overton set about recovering his temper. He had a system for doing this. He did not count ten. Faced with the inadequacies of the world, he shut his eyes; he told himself slowly that he was an officer with an unblemished record; and he thanked God that such things could never happen aboard his ship. He then mentally went the rounds, admiring, in his mind's eye, the neatly coiled ropes, the spotless deck, and the shining brasswork, until his spirits were soothed.

Meanwhile, the three officers stood in the sun, furtively dabbing their foreheads, the parakeets returned one by one to their branches, and Bunt wondered if any man had ever been so miserable before.

Captain Overton opened his eyes. "Come now," he said, mildly. "Is there anything else that you have to show me, Sergeant Bunt?"

Bunt clenched his fists. He wetted his dry lips. "In what way, sir?"

"Well," said Captain Overton, still under the soothing influence of his brief meditation, "a little kitchen garden, for instance."

Bunt sighed windily with immense relief. "Oh no. Nothing like that," he said, with somewhat incautious cheerfulness.

A frown began to gather on the Captain's brow. "No kitchen garden, eh? Did you grow flowers, perhaps?"

"Oh no. I just picked them off the bushes."

"Did you tame any animals?"

"Never saw any animals, sir. It's curious, as I said to myself—"

"Or birds?"

"No, sir."

"Did you never teach a parrot to talk?"

"I never caught one, sir."

"Did you," said Captain Overton, summoning his last recollection of his favourite book, "build a bower?"

"I beg your pardon, sir. A what, sir?"

"A bower, Bunt. A place in a cool spot where you would take your ease on a sultry night."

Bunt had a brief struggle with himself, but he knew the outcome of it before it started. He was a middle-aged man. He owed something to what remained of his dignity. He raised his bearded chin a little higher, and looked the Captain in the face. "I'd rather not answer that question, begging your pardon, sir."

"I order you to answer."

"Yes, sir. But with all due respect, sir, I'd rather not."

"Are you deliberately flouting my commands, Bunt?"

"I can't do nowise else, sir."

"Sergeant Bunt, I shall repeat my question slowly, to give you time to reconsider your conduct." He repeated it.

Bunt stood silent, his cheeks aflame, but his expression resolute.

"So you persist in your mutinous behaviour?"

"Yes, sir. You can flog me if you like, sir, but I'll not answer your question."

"Flogging has been abolished in Her Majesty's Navy," said Captain Overton, "otherwise I should have been happy to oblige you. However, I can no doubt arrange to have you hanged from the yard-arm in Portsmouth harbour with only the slightest delay for a few formalities. Their Lordships at the Admiralty are very sensitive about mutiny, Bunt. Oh, Mr. Wilkins."

"Here, sir," said Wilkins.

"Get ready to place this man under close arrest."

Wilkins moved towards Bunt.

" I said, ' Get ready,' Mr. Wilkins. I would not like to feel that I had hurried Sergeant Bunt in any way in making up his mind. He has fully—" he paused, and took a large watch from the pocket of his embroidered coat—" fifteen seconds in which to save his neck," he said.

Captain Overton's virtues shone most brightly when he was a man of action. Now he stood, relaxed and easy, in perfect control of himself. He watched the face of his watch with no more tenseness than if he had been boiling an egg.

It was quite otherwise with Bunt. The flush drained from his cheeks, only to return more crimson than ever. He wiped his perspiring hands up and down the legs of his drawers. He breathed heavily, and once he groaned.

Captain Overton snapped the cover of his watch into place " Well, Bunt? " he said, crisply.

Bunt sagged; his cheeks fell, his head dropped.

" I'll show you, sir," he whispered. " Please to follow me."

He led them, barely looking at the path, through clumps of flowering bushes to a place some two hundred yards distant from the village, where there was a low rocky bluff, the first step of the hill that formed the middle of the island. When they had arrived, he pointed silently to a cave, the entrance of which was about eight foot high and four broad.

" There, sir," he said, and looked fixedly at the ground.

The Captain ran his eyes over the cliff face, the cave entrance, and the ground round about, which was covered with footprints.

" Bunt! "

" Yessir."

" Look up, man, look up, when I speak to you."

Bunt raised his eyes with immense reluctance. He carefully avoided looking at the cave.

" What is the meaning of that thing hung on a pole above the opening of that cave? "

" It's a ship's lantern, sir."

" I can see that for myself. What is it doing there? "

" It's red, sir."

" I can see that, too. It's the lantern I left so that you could signal if you saw ships' lights in the night. Is that what it is there for? "

" I'm afraid not, sir."

" Then explain why you put it there."

" It's a sign, sir," said Bunt. He passed his hand over his face wearily. " It's like billiards, in a manner of speaking. It's a sign of a misspent youth. P'raps, if you'd go inside sir, you'll get the information you're seeking."

Captain Overton was a stern, but he was not a cruel man. Bunt's misery was so deep and plain that he did as the unhappy sergeant asked him. He went into the cave, he stayed for some minutes, and then he came out. His face was even more set than

when he had seen the hut, but there was, in addition, a hint of astonishment in his manner of delivering his next order.

" Mr. Wilkins and Mr. Arkwright. You will please go into the cavern and take note of what you find there. Do not try to burden your memories with the details. Write them down. No, Mr. Thompson! " he said peremptorily, as the most junior officer of all made to follow his companions. Captain Overton barred his way with his gold-braided arm. " You are too young, Mr. Thompson, for this particular duty."

Captain Overton looked up at the lamp, then at Bunt. " This cave, I take it, Bunt, was your brothel? "

Bunt swayed. " Do you mind, Captain, if I sit down? " he said. " I'm afraid I've come over faint." With that he sank down upon a rock and, burying his head in his hands, sobbed silently.

" Mr. Thompson," said Captain Overton. " Go down to the longboat and bring up the case-bottle. Tell the seamen that they may seek shade if they wish, but they are on no account to move beyond a radius of fifty yards from the longboat. Return here as quickly as you can."

Young Mr. Thompson cast a longing eye on the cave from which, at that moment, sounded several hearty guffaws.

" Cut along now, Mr. Thompson, cut along," said the Captain, in a surprisingly paternal voice, and Thompson obeyed. As for the guffaws, the Captain, for once, took no notice at all of such a flagrant breach of decorum. First dusting a rock with his handkerchief, he sat down opposite Bunt.

The two officers inside the cave stood, memorandum books in hand, staring at four neatly laid-out female figures, contrived as before, but with a much more brazen hand. The figures sported gay but exiguous costumes, made out of the set of signal flags which Captain Overton had provided in the cache.

On the walls of the cave against which the upper parts of their bodies (composed of gourds and coconut shells) were leaning, Matthew Bunt had drawn charcoal frescoes. These were vivid enough, even although they lacked any sign of what might be called imaginative art. They were, in fact, dimly remembered copies of pictures which Matthew Bunt had seen while on shore leave in various parts of the world, and in various houses of ill fame.

Their inventory finished, the two officers emerged. They found Thompson had returned and that Bunt was much recovered. He was explaining, with many pauses and broken sentences, how he had come to make the retreat which they had just seen.

As far as they could follow, the real cause of it had been Lola, who, after the providential death of Bunt's wife, had been his sole companion on the island. Custom had staled her charms, it seemed, and Bunt had taken to going for long and somewhat ill-tempered walks round the island, especially on moonlit nights. One night, when the moon had been fitfully covered with clouds, he had taken some of Captain Overton's oil and put it in Captain Overton's red lamp to help him light his way.

Then, "Just as a joke, sir," Bunt explained, "just to get me out of my cross-patch mood with . . . with—well, never mind who—I hung it up. It's a good lamp, sir, and it burnt all night. I slept out, sir, not wanting to go back home, and about 3 p.m., sir, I woke up and saw it, and well, sir, the idea came into my head like a flash and there you are, sir. It seemed all right at the time, but I do see it was the work of the Devil, sir. I do see that now," he said.

Captain Overton gave no sign. He watched Bunt gravely, like one who did not wish to judge, but who knew what his judgment would be if he did. It was an expression familiar to Bunt from his youth.

Bunt glanced at the two officers with their notebooks in hand. "You've made a list," he said guiltily.

"Yes, Bunt."

"You've put the pink shells down to my credit, I hope, gentlemen. You've at least put them down, haven't you?"

Captain Overton stirred. "Address your remarks to the senior officer present, Sergeant, which is myself. What shells?"

"Little pink ones, sir. They are very, very hard to find, sir, ones just like that. It might take you hours and it might take you all day, just to find one. Very pretty they are, when you wash them, but very hard to see in the wet sand."

Captain Overton's stern features softened. "You collected these pretty shells, Bunt?"

"I did, sir."

"I am deeply gratified to hear it, Bunt," said Captain Overton. "It is my firmest belief that no man is wholly bad. This collecting of shells, Bunt, is the one innocent pastime that you have told us about; the only one, but one is enough. It shall certainly go down to your credit. Gentlemen, see that the shells are properly noted. But why," he said, with a puzzled frown, "did you keep them in this reprehensible cavern?"

Bunt, quite carried away by the Captain's praise, said, "That was the idea, sir. It was a sort of check. I made myself pay one of them every time I went, and since they were difficult to find I . . ."

"Mr. Wilkins," roared the Captain, jumping to his feet, "collect every one of those goddammed shells and bring them here at once. I'm going," he said in a terrible voice, "to hang 'em round your heathen neck, Bunt, and make you wear 'em from here to Portsmouth gaol."

But he could not carry out his threat, because there were far too many shells.

Mr. Wilkins and Mr. Arkwright, to Mr. Thompson's crowing delight, brought them out by hatfuls, and when the last hatful was poured at the Captain's feet, Matthew Bunt tasted the bitter draught of his shame to its last dregs.

Recalling it, sitting in the meeting-hall, with the rain beating against the window panes, Bunt shivered.

Prince put some more coal into the stove. "Did Captain

Overton carry out his threat, Sergeant Bunt?" Prince asked him.

"No, sir," said the Sergeant. "He kept me in the brig as far as Portsmouth, sir, and then he told me that if I'd learnt my lesson he'd say no more about it than was necessary for the report to their Lordships and he'd make that brief, 'for the sake,' he said, 'of decency and decorum.' Well, that was fine as far as it went, sir, but the officers had their notebooks and well, sir, Portsmouth's a small place, especially when a seafaring man's concerned."

Bunt hung his head for a moment, then sighed, and looked up. "I asked for my discharge, sir, and came here. I'd got my savings and I bought myself a concession on the beach. Quite profitable it is, too."

"Which one is it, Sergeant?" asked Prince.

Bunt reddened.

"The ladies'-bathing-machine one, sir. And that's it in a nutshell, sir. That's my trouble, sir, that I'd like your advice on. You see, sir," said Bunt, "I'm what you might call a religious man. I was brought up strict, sir, and strict I would like to remain. Since I've been on the beach, sir, I've been a regular churchgoer, sir, twice every Sunday, and if I can hear an improving sermon in the course of the week, so much the better. I know what's right, sir, and I'd like to do what's right. It's just that I've got this little difficulty over the ladies.

"I know what you're going to say, sir," he went on. "You're going to say, 'Fight it, Bunt,' just like all the other clergymen that I've had the privilege of having a quiet word with. 'Fight the Devil, Bunt, wrestle with the Tempter.' Those were the very words of the Vicar, a nice, kind gentleman, sir, very quiet-living.

"When I spoke to him about the temptations of the flesh, I could see by the way he looked at me that he had *heard* of them all right. Read a book, or something, I dare say. But as for *wrestling*, sir, I don't think he'd done much of it, more's the credit to him, more's the credit.

"But as for me, well, Mr. Prince, there's not much about wrestling with temptation I don't know. Half-nelson, scissors grip, rabbit punching—all in a manner of speaking—I've got the lot at my fingertips. The Devil don't stand a chance with me in fair fight. I wrestle him and I wrestle him and I get his shoulders to the mat and I sit across his chest and I say, 'Do you give up or do you want some more?' And he says, 'Sergeant, I give up.' So then he gets off the floor, sir, and holds out his hand, and says, 'Sergeant Bunt, you're a better man than I am.' I take his hand, sir, and the next thing I know is that I'm flat on my back."

He paused and looked into the fire. "If you understand me, sir," he said.

"I do," said Prince.

"I've sometimes had doubts," said Matthew Bunt, "if the Christian faith was quite the one for a religious man like me with my particular obstacles. I've searched around a bit, I must admit. It seems to me that there ought to be a good, sound, respectable

Church that allows a man who has a weakness for the ladies to give way to it—just to save time and bother—without blotting his copy-book. I can't say that I've found one as yet."

Prince put his fingertips together. He pursed his lips, both for the sacerdotal air it gave him, and for its usefulness in hiding the fact that he was struggling with laughter. "You might," he said, "become a Mohammedan, Mr. Bunt."

"I've thought of that," said Bunt. "Being, as you might say, a travelled man, it's come my way, and I know what you mean. But, after all, I'm English and proud of it, and it doesn't seem to be—mind you, I'm not saying anything against it—but it doesn't seem to be a very English religion, does it, Mr. Prince?"

"So few religions are," said Prince. "As you must have noticed in your theological studies, it is singular how many foreigners have managed to push their oar in."

"They're my sentiments to a T," said Bunt.

"Are you married, Bunt?" asked Prince.

Bunt looked sadly into the fire for a moment. "In a manner of speaking, yes, I am."

Prince, with tact, said nothing.

"It was the first thing I put my mind to when I came back," Bunt went on, "especially after the remarks that Captain Overton made on that awful day. But I don't know, Mr. Prince, it seems to me there's a lot about this marriage business that nobody's quite thought out."

"It's not for lack of trying," said Prince. "St. Paul said . . ."

"Better marry than burn," quoted Bunt promptly.

"And," Prince continued, "theologians have been arguing ever since as to what he meant."

"It doesn't mean better marry than fry in Hell, sir?" said Bunt, deeply interested.

"It might do, Sergeant. On the other hand, it might just mean that it is preferable to marry than be constantly distracted by . . . by . . ." Prince coughed and sought for words.

"By the ladies," said Bunt.

"Yes," said Prince. "What a useful phrase that is of yours. I must remember it."

"From my experience," said Bunt with finality, "he must have meant Hell, sir, because St. Paul couldn't be wrong and the other thing doesn't work. I know. I've tried it."

He undid a button of his coat to ease his paunch a little and continued, "I wasn't ashore a month, sir, when I found myself a good, honest girl—well, woman she was by that time—that I'd known since I was a boy. She was willing, I was willing, and I'd saved up enough pay to do the thing with an easy mind, so we got spliced—married, that is, begging your pardon for the expression. Now, I've got nothing against Nellie. She was a good cook, she kept the house clean, and she looked after me hand and foot. But . . ." He stopped.

"She was unfaithful?" suggested Prince.

Bunt shook his ponderous head with a look of great melancholy. "No, sir. Not Nellie. I was the only man that she ever had eyes for."

"Very proper, Sergeant."

"If you'll excuse me," said Bunt, "that's just what it wasn't. It was the other way about. A loving wife, a really loving wife, can be a great stumbling-stone to a man what's trying to rise to higher things. No sooner had I settled down by the fire of an evening and composed my thoughts, just as we're sitting here, me with a good book and her with her sewing, than I'd know what she was thinking of."

"What?" asked Prince, and then, hastily, "Oh yes, I see. But that's a wife's privilege, Sergeant, you can't hold it against her."

"I don't hold it against her personally, Mr. Prince. Not against Nellikins. It's the whole idea of the thing that I'm against. I mean, sir, if you'll allow me to mention the topic, a man that's fighting the urge to go out and get himself drunk each evening, for instance, sir, isn't going to be helped if someone sits on the other side of the fireplace hour after hour making a noise like popping corks. Is he, sir? I ask you fairly?"

"And as fairly, Sergeant, I reply, no, he isn't. I confess I had never thought of it like that."

"Well, if it surprises a learned gentleman like you," said Bunt, "you can guess how it puzzled Nellie. 'But you love me, Matt,' she'd say, with her forehead all wrinkled up and tears not far away, 'you love me, Matt, and you're my husband. Don't you want to make me happy?' 'Yes, I do, Nellie,' I'd tell her and it was no less than the truth, as always with me in dealing with the fair sex. 'Well, then, Matt,' she would say, 'don't be a silly old bear.' So I'd make her happy, and in no time at all I was making several other ladies of the town happy, and, of course, Nell found out. She went home to her mother and there she is, poor girl, at this moment. So you see what I mean when I say that not enough thinking has been done about the matter, Mr. Prince. It doesn't touch my problem."

"I don't believe that much thinking has been done recently," said Prince. "But a considerable time back, some fourteen hundred years ago, there was quite a deal of discussion about the very problem that is bothering you, Sergeant. That is the . . . er . . . corks, as you put it. A great number of very noly men, many of whom subsequently became saints, decided that the only way of avoiding temptation was to go off into the wilderness and live absolutely alone . . ."

"I've done that," said Bunt, with simplicity.

Prince paused. He looked at Bunt. "By George," he said, "so you have. You know, Bunt, you're quite right. Morally, you pose a deeply interesting problem."

"I'm very glad and honoured to hear you say that, sir," he said. "All the time I've been coming to your meetings, I've been saying to myself, 'There's the gentleman who can help me, if anybody

can.' You see, sir, I know you're a very learned clergyman, and besides that, as everybody says, you're partial to the ladies yourself and . . ." He stopped. He placed his hand over his mouth. He blushed furiously. He took his hand away from his mouth and said contritely, " Cor love me, I shouldn't have said that."

Prince looked at him for a moment, and then ran his eyes round the empty rows of seats. He sighed deeply. " Why shouldn't you say it, if everybody else does? Yes, Bunt—you were saying that you thought I could help you."

" If I may presume, sir," said Bunt humbly. " Yes."

Prince got up and walked a few paces up and down. At the end of one of his promenades he looked over his shoulder at Bunt and asked suddenly, " *Everybody* is saying it, Bunt, did you say? "

" I beg your pardon, Mr. Prince? "

" About myself and the ladies. You may speak quite frankly, Sergeant."

" It's quite well known—I mean," said Bunt, correcting himself, " there's a lot of gossip, all false, of course, as it always is."

" Not always, Bunt," said Prince. " Not always." He took hold of the lapels of his coat and resumed his walk, looking intently at the bare floorboards. Bunt watched in a respectful silence.

Prince came up to the fire. Still holding his lapels, he looked down at the heavy figure of Bunt, and smiled. It was, as his female disciples said, a very beautiful smile. " Sergeant Bunt," he said, " clergymen have their secrets just as other people do."

" I'm sure I'm very sorry if I said anything that was impertinent," said Bunt.

" No, no. Those are not the secrets that I mean," said Prince reassuringly. " I mean we have our little professional secrets. Among them, friend," he went on, his voice gathering its customary public richness, " are sermons. The sermons that we preach in the pulpit are very edifying and not at all surprising. But we have little sermons which we preach among ourselves, especially to the younger members of our profession. They are also edifying, but perhaps a little more unexpected. One, I remember, was preached to me by a very wise old bishop, to whom I had gone one day in great anguish of mind. I was struggling, friend, struggling . . ."

He stopped. He smiled broadly and, dropping his rich tones for the briefest instant, said, " Well, Bunt, it was about the ladies. The bishop, I suppose," he resumed, once more in his organ tones, " had preached it to hundreds of young ordinands, and some other bishop had preached it to him. I didn't think a great deal of it at the time—in fact, I quarrelled with the bishop who told it to me—but as the years have rolled on I have had increasing cause to remember it. I am going to tell it you, Sergeant, although it is not the thing one would ordinarily tell a layman. But I feel, friend, that your faithful attendance at my gatherings has given you some sort of ecclesiastical status, comparable perhaps," and his eyes twinkled at Bunt who was following him open-mouthed, " to those dignitaries in the early church such as doorkeepers, or . . . or yes,

exorcists. I am sure, Bunt, you may be regarded as an exorcist, and thus on the lowest rung of the hierarchy, but still on it."

"I'm sure I'm very much obliged to you," said Bunt in an awed whisper.

Prince was about to embark on the opening sentences of this remarkable sermon, when he was interrupted by the entrance of his wife, Julia. She carried a large tray with several steaming dishes on it, and was followed by the caretaker with yet another.

"Look," she said, holding the door back with her foot. "Look at all the lovely things we've been getting ready. Oh!" she went on as she observed that Prince was still grasping the lapels of his coat. "I'm so sorry. Were you preaching?"

"Yes," said Matthew Bunt, reverently. "He was going to preach to me—something wonderful." But the nature of this astonishing sermon remained undisclosed. At the sight of the delectable repast, Prince took his hands away from his lapels. He relieved Julia of the tray and kissed her on the forehead.

"My dear," he said, "let us eat. Ask our friend to join us. You will be delighted to discover that Mr. Matthew Bunt is a man of great moral perspicacity."

★ ★ ★

TWO'S NOT COMPANY

We list below seven extreme cases of double identity. Can you disentangle the two personalities in each case and give source and author? Solutions are on page 106.

1. *Oh I am a cook and a captain bold*
   I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.

2. *Hither, page, and stand by me*
   And don't dilly-dally on the way.

3. *Lars Porsena of Clusium*
   By the nine gods he swore
   And his horse in the silence champed the grasses
   On the forest's ferny floor.

4. *When I play on my fiddle in Dooney*
   Everything's goin' my way.

5. *Starve, scourge, deride me, I am dumb,*
   I am Duchess of Malfi still.

6. *Bess, the landlord's daughter*
   She washed her feet in soda water
   She didn't oughter.

7. *Come open the gates and let me gang free*
   For there's cats in the coffee and mice in the tea.

" But you told me to come as I was "

SEXTET is a selection of drawings from
The Lovers' Bedside Book
by RAYMOND PEYNET

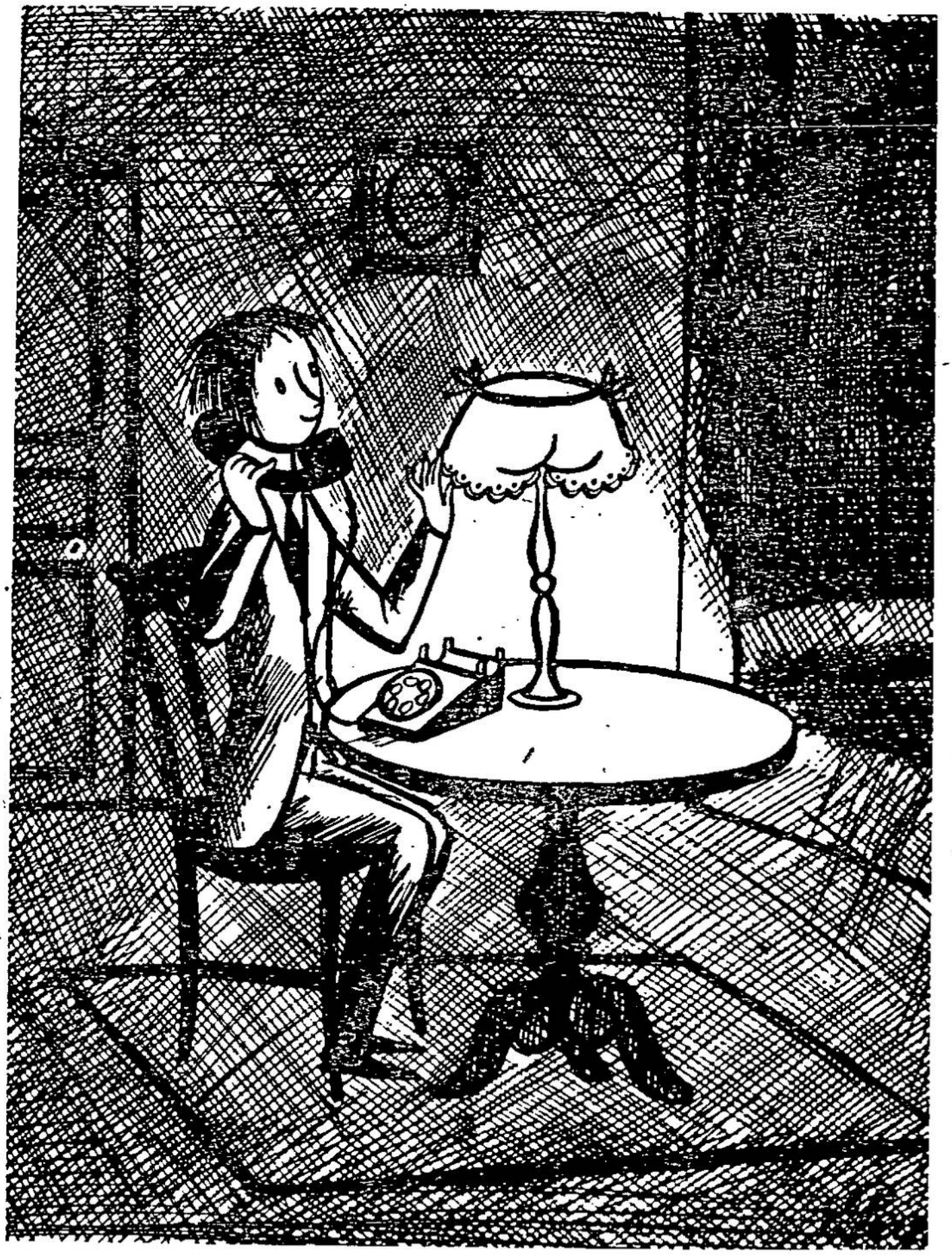
His world of lovers, writes H. E. Bates, of parks, of birds, of cherrytime . . . is intensely lyrical. It is also intensely French.

" Better put this shoal on, darling "

Sextet *by Peynet*

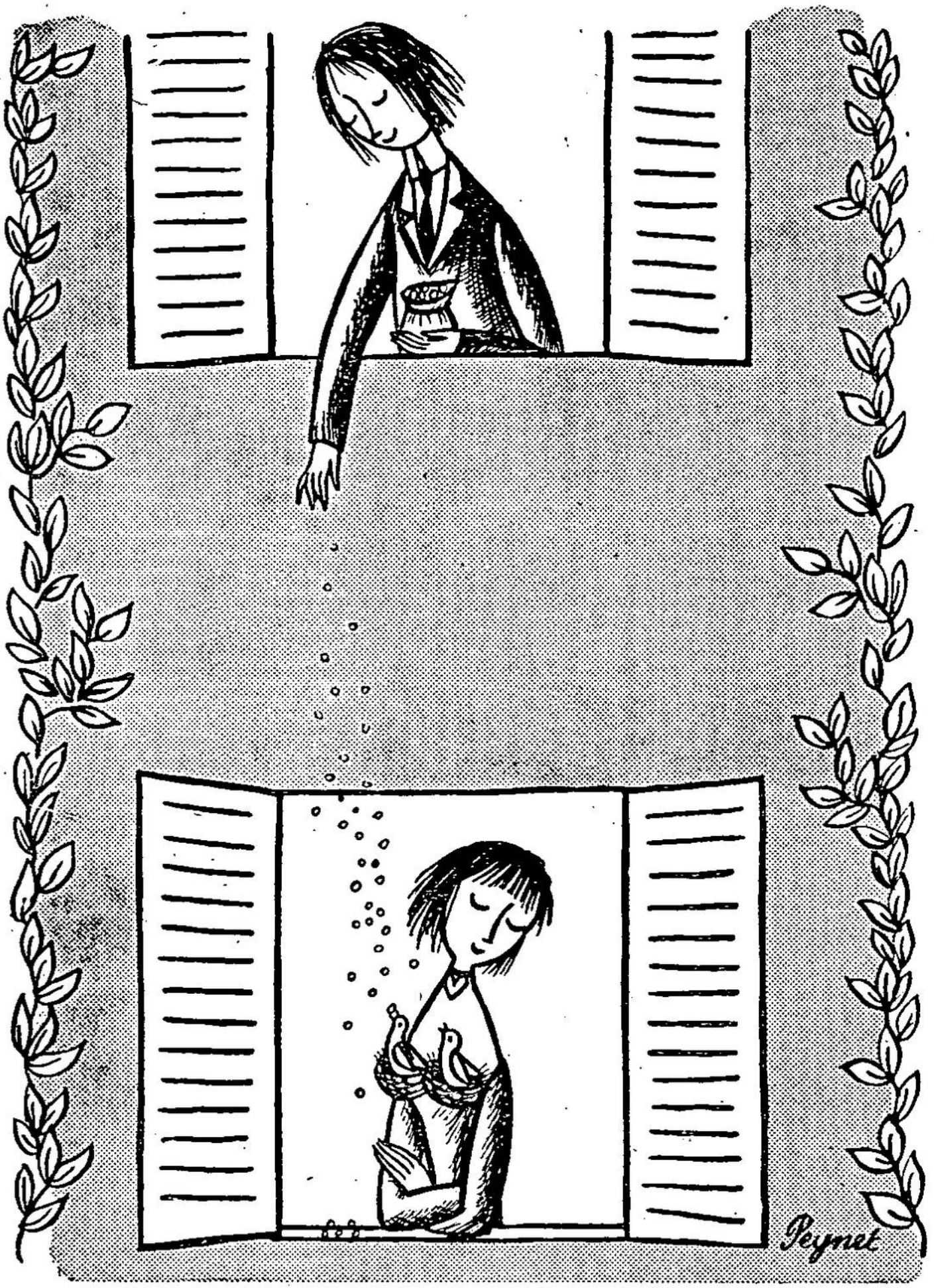
" Ah ! Spring . . . "

Sextet *by Peynet*

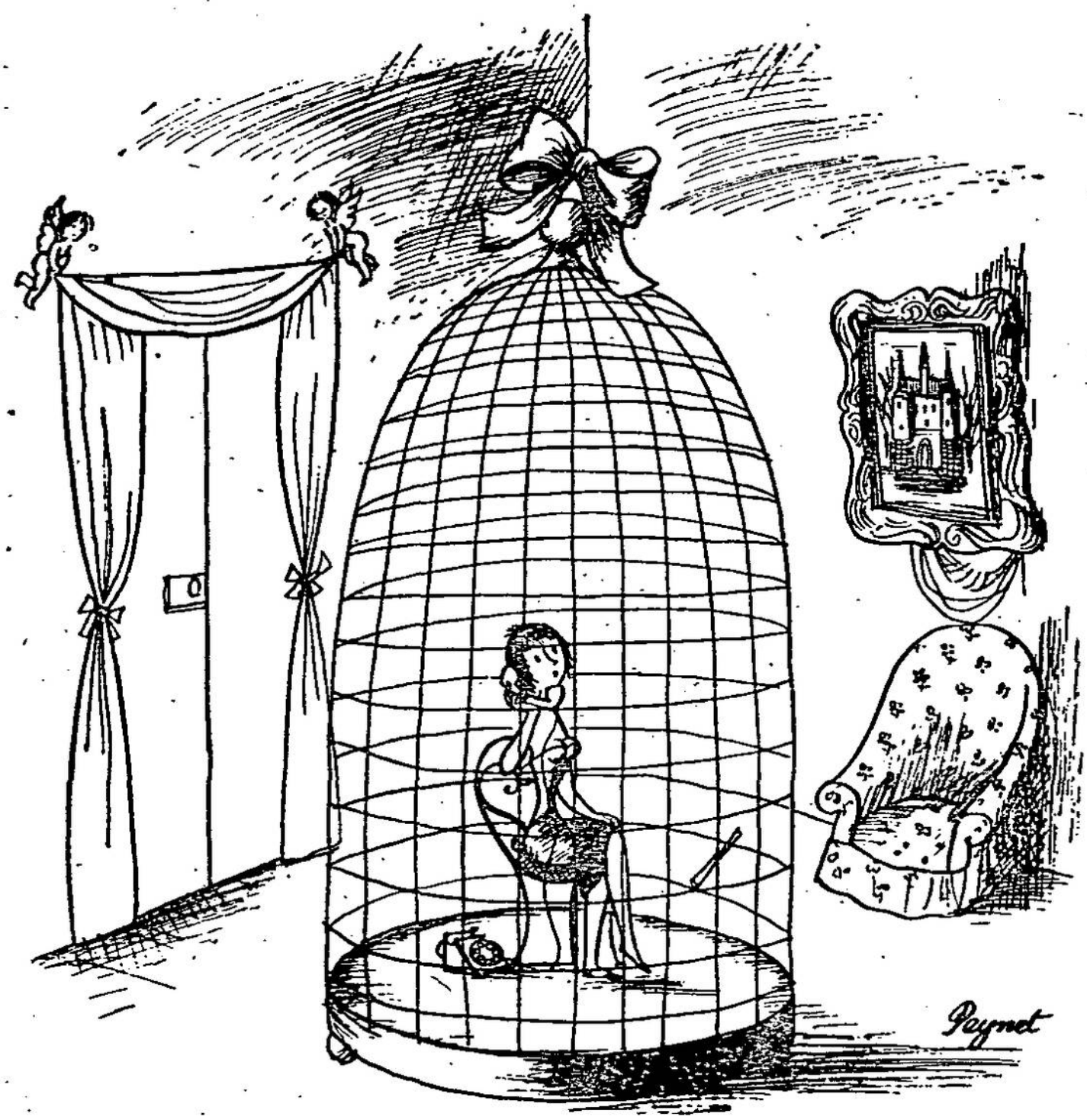


" Of course I am always thinking about you, chérie "

Sextet *by Peynet*



Love Birds



" Mother—he doesn't trust me ! "

Peynet was born in Paris 48 years ago. His first cartoon was published when he was 22. He married the original and only 'Elle,' an art student called Denise, and they live in a flat in Paris and a restored château in the south of France. Today Peynet is one of the best-loved French cartoonists. One winter, Parisian Christmas-shoppers along the boulevards were entranced to find the windows in one of the largest stores had all been decorated in the Peynet style.

DODO UNTO OTHERS

Even gulls' eggs made him feel funny

BY JOHN ORMEROD

"PAY attention!" shouted the Head of All the Naguars. "The breed is falling low. Ignore me at your peril, you youngsters!" he roared at two very young naguettes who were whispering at the back of the crowd. "All I can say is: remember the dodo!" This was a cruel, unfair remark, and the naguars drooped their heads and wished the meeting was over.

The sting in the old naguar's words was due to the slight resemblance that the naguars bore to the long-extinct dodo. But there was no connection, as the naguars would tell each other more than once a day. And there had never been any of what elderly lady naguars called "that sort of thing," either.

It was coincidence—moreover, there were differences. Naguars were smaller than dodoes had been, and neater on their clawed feet, and they could swim. They were not at all the type of birds who would let themselves become extinct. Dear me, no. So they listened to the old naguar in sullen annoyance.

He was an eccentric bird, the Leader of that period. He was quite obsessed by the idea of extinction, and at that same meeting he had announced his plans for preserving the breed.

All families were to have eggs. That was simple, and nobody argued. Secondly, half the flock was to cross the island and set up a colony on the other side, and have eggs. Then, he maintained, fire, water, or pestilence would have to strike twice. This caused an almighty fuss, but it was accomplished.

Lastly, three pairs of engaged or married naguars were to swim to the next island. They were to look for other naguars. They were to have eggs. This nearly caused a riot.

There certainly was a next-door island, because the seagulls flew to it, but it was out of sight, and so far beyond the swimming reach of a naguar that the old Leader was simply asking three couples to commit suicide. However, he knew his young naguars, and in due course, three foolhardy couples set off, and of course vanished from sight or sound or news.

But all this happened years ago, and the old leader of all the naguars, so long dead, had proved to be no eccentric, but a wise and prophetic bird. The breed had died . . .

The last of the naguars, a well-built young male in his fortieth year, sat on a rock by the sea, absently sliding pebbles into the water with his wingtip, and thought about the terrible aches of loneliness that ran through his heart. He could just remember the better days—he had been one of the whispering naguettes at that far-away meeting—and he remembered thinking the whole thing rather pointless. Well, now he knew.

What made matters worse was that he was Leader of All the Naguars, in lawful succession from the old bird, who had been his great-uncle. When two eggs in the direct line had addled, and the title had crossed to his family, he had been unreservedly delighted. Now there was nobody to lead.

A tidal avalanche had struck the far colony, and pestilence this one—the dreaded colly. Colly affects neither animal, fish, nor any other bird. It is for naguars only, and nearly always fatal.

He himself had groaned in delirious pains for five weeks, and when the colly left him he had woken to find a hopeful vulture perched by his bedding. He had chased away the vulture, and now he had to face ninety-odd years on his own.

A baby crab appeared through a slit in the rock. He had once loved crab, but now he wasn't hungry.

"What's the point?" he said to himself. "What is the point?" A sudden wave of indignation overcame him.

He stamped along the beach, shouting: "No more naguars! No more naguars!" The phrase had a good swing to it when taken with long strides, and he felt a little better—well enough, in fact, to climb to the top of the beach, turn, rush down to the sea, and take a running splash at a couple of seagulls.

Strolling up the beach, with the sun drying his feathers, an idea came to him, which shows how loneliness had begun to affect him. "I'll pretend," he said, "I'll make a speech."

He pushed his way through the bushes to the naguar ground. The old clearing was overgrown, but it was just possible to see where the crowd had once stood for meetings.

There, too, was the small mound of earth, reserved down the ages for the Leader of All the Naguars.

The naguar climbed up the mound, looked down, and nearly gave way to tears when he remembered the last time he had stood there. Now there were weeds all round him so that the mound of dignity and office hardly looked like a mound at all. Roughly he pushed aside some spindly stalks that reached almost to his beak.

"Fellow naguars!" he said, "the days of terror and oblivion

are over. Once again a fine and healthy breed of birds graces this fair land. Let us now learn from our mistakes." And so on. It was a fine speech, and only ended when the echo of his voice washed over the pretending, and made him feel sick and too tired to deceive himself.

That night, in the finest of the ground nestings—the only usable one now—the naguar had a dream. It was one of those dreams where you come in halfway through your own conversation. He was talking to a bird slightly larger than himself and less tidy, and with a rather more bent, dig-in-the-sand sort of beak. The naguar found that he was saying, " I don't care what you say. It's inconceivable and quite against nature."

" Huh," said the dodo, " is it, just! All *I* can say is, wait till you've been extinct for nearly three hundred years. Just wait."

" What is it like, really?"

" Being extinct? It's awful. It's so—so *pointless*. More than anything else, it's the egglessness of it that gets you down."

" Eggs is the thing," said the naguar, gloomily. " I've begun to notice that even gulls' eggs make me feel funny."

" You'll have to get over that," said the dodo severely. " Think of why you're becoming extinct. It's an excellent discipline."

" Too late to be of any use, though."

" Couldn't you leave a message for other birds, or something?"

" Yes, I could!" said the naguar. " That would make me feel much better. It would be a sort of flourish for the end, wouldn't it?" He lay back and thought for a moment. " We, the naguars, never again to be seen on this earth, died because we—because—" He sat up. " Do you happen to know why we did die out?"

" Well, what happened?"

" We all caught colly."

" *All* of you?"

" All of us here. There were some on the other side of the island. A tidal wave came in and drowned them."

" They must have colonized too near the shore," said the dodo.

" No nearer than this," said the naguar smartly. " We knew quite well how to colonize, thank you."

" When I was a live dodo," said the dodo dreamily, " we hardly ever saw the naguars. They lived high up on the rocks. But that was three centuries ago."

" But what an extraordinary place to live! What about fish?"

" They walked," said the dodo. " The naguars, not the fish. They walked down to the beach every day, and back again. And because of that they had fine sturdy legs, packed with muscles. You, I suppose, consider yourself a promising young naguar, but you don't compare with your ancestors."

The naguar looked at his weedy scales, and thought harder.

"Mind you," said the dodo, "we thought you were fools in those days, walking two miles each way for your food. But you were safe and tough in your hide-out, and we became extinct. Then, I suppose, there was no trouble on the beach for some years, no waves or fires or colly, and you forgot."

"But it's so easy here!" cried the naguar.

"Exactly," said the dodo, and changed into a seagull . . .

The naguar stared for some seconds, and then realized what had happened. He had woken up. And he was now looking at a seagull that wanted to speak to him.

"There's a dead naguar on the shore," said the seagull contemptuously, nudging him with his nasty little webbed foot.

"There can't be!"

"Well, there is." But the naguar had gone. He was racing down the beach, kicking up clouds of dry sand, his wings flapping like paddles.

The body was almost in the water. Another wave was coming in. Using this as a help, the naguar grabbed a feather in his beak, and pulled. Water washed over them both, and seconds later, with a few more hearty tugs, they were above the normal tidal line, back on the dry sand.

It was a young, female naguar, not pretty, but with an attractive, intriguing little face. He put his head on her chest, and heard the faintest heartbeat.

Desperate with excitement, he scooped a protective nest in the powdery sand, laid her in it, and crouched on the edge to wait.

An hour later she was well enough to talk. She had swum from another island, a terrible journey away. There had been a small naguar colony for a few years, and she had been born there. A bush fire had destroyed scores of eggs, and they were dying out. The remaining naguars were going to swim here, or try.

Somehow the naguar—Leader of an unknown quantity of Naguars—managed to restrain for the moment all the things he had to say, all the warm, affectionate, exciting, companionable things he had wanted to say for so long.

"Think you can walk yet?" he said briskly.

"A little way, I think."

The naguar sat down again. "That's no good. Rest a little longer. We have a long, steep climb ahead of us."

★ ★ ★

When you have finished reading this copy of ARGOSY, why not pass it on to a member of H.M. Forces?

SILENT PRISM

In one small fragment of her face
was the entire book of love

BY MARK VAN DOREN

THE man in front of him never turned his head enough for a profile to show. It was as if he had no face—nothing but this thick neck for which the blue shirt collar seemed a little tight, and this broad, flat-backed head which Dr. Henderson increasingly disliked. What he disliked was that the fellow never turned and looked at the beautiful woman by his side, between him and the train window. She was looking at him. Her eyes were always on him, no matter what field or town flew by outdoors, and no matter how brutal his indifference was.

The doctor could see it as nothing but brutal, or if not that, stupid. For the woman's eyes had fascinated him from the first, and he could not understand how anybody could resist them. Or resist, if he must be accurate, the one eye that he saw.

He had become aware of it just after the train left Newark, where the sun, streaming through the dusty window at her right, had streamed through this miracle also, this wonder of a woman's eye which received sunlight only to give it forth again as adoration. She never turned her own head far enough for the whole face to become visible. She had no interest, obviously, in looking behind her, at him, the doctor, or at any other man who might be there. Her entire attention was upon this lout who so patently did not deserve her; who never so much as inclined his forehead to behold the object that was his.

Dr. Henderson, leaning back in his seat, reflected sleepily upon the fact that a mere fragment of face could absorb him so much. When he closed his eyes, as he did from moment to moment, he realized that his mind contained no picture of the woman herself.

If he should meet her face to face he might not recognize her; if he should get up now and go to the front of the car for a drink of water, on the way back he could indeed stare down at all of her there was, but the face he found there would have little relation, little necessary relation, to the piece of it through which the sun had struck. Or so he supposed.

At any rate, he would not go. He might be disappointed. He

preferred to lean back and think about the wonder of the human eye—this eye, this blue one, at which even now he could not keep from gazing over the upholstery that separated him from it.

What was she saying? She was the talker of the two, and she must be saying many things, of many kinds and in many tones. For the expression about her eyes—or eye—was constantly changing. Was it ever happy? But the doctor decided to let the question pass. For all he knew, their communication was commonplace. It was the eye, the blue eye with its impersonal universe of light and love, which he took pleasure in contemplating.

Between his half-closed lids he watched it, amused whenever he realized how unconscious of him its owner was. But his amusement was only momentary. It was a serious matter, this beauty of the human eye, set in a corner of the human head like a transparent jewel—and well set, for there was beauty too in the pair of diverging lines between which, at the widest part, the cornea glistened and the iris shone in its true, its indestructible colour: in this case, sky-blue. The two lines, of course, were only a part of the setting. The lids, the lashes, the brows, and all the play of skin and flesh as they answered the spirit within, expressing its most evanescent changes, were equally essential to the work of wonder that every minute, every second, was performed.

He found that it was as difficult for him as it would be for any layman to believe that the ball of the eye itself can never alter: that feeling and idea reveal themselves only in the surrounding flesh, the subtlety of whose power most persons underestimate. Laughter and pain, he made himself remember, along with disappointment and fear, hope and high ardour, and—yes—adoration, are the face's grammar, not the eye's alone.

The sphere itself, could it be observed in isolation, would turn out to be a fixed and staring thing, an orb of jelly with which only the laws of optics had to do. To them it was obedient, but as prisms are, as burning glasses and the bottoms of tumblers when they are held up to candlelight. An equation formed itself in his somnolent thought: the eyeball is to the adjacent countenance as eternity is to time. Expressions come and go, but the orb remains.

Yet even it does not remain, Dr. Henderson reminded himself. Death dries it, and it shrinks away, it vanishes like a gem some thief has stolen. But the thief hides the gem somewhere; time does not hide our eyes, which merely dwindle to points in space, and then not even that.

This beautiful object he studied now, this woman's blue and

loving eye, was attached by the frailest tissues to the bone around it; and some day only the bone would be visible. He recalled the hugeness and sadness of the sockets he had seen at medical school, in skulls. That was it.

Then, given *enough* time, even the bone went, even the skull fell into dust which the wind blew away or the earth devoured. Nothing of what he saw would last for ever. And the woman didn't know that. It must be the last thing she was thinking of. She was thinking only of the imperfect creature at her side whom she adored. He would be gone, too, given age and time. But Dr. Henderson was not interested in his passing. In a sense he was dead already; he did not know what he had in her who sat between him and the window, reciting in one small fragment of her face—which went so well with her pale curls and the hat with one bright flower on it—the entire book of love, creating and conquering doubt.

Dr. Henderson came to his senses slowly. The guard had been shaking him a long time before he opened his eyes at all, and then he used them to locate, if he could, the woman he had dreamt about. He had dreamt that she became one of those variety dancers whose black garments are painted to look like skeletons when the stage is darkened—painted with phosphorus—and that in her case, when the lights came on again, she was in reality a skeleton, her flesh having needed but five minutes to depart from ribs and skull. The sockets where her eyes had been . . .

The guard shook him with genuine impatience now, and he stared up into grey eyes that frowned at him from under a shiny black peaked cap.

" What is it? " he asked. " I was going through to Washington. That's the last stop, isn't it? "

The guard nodded at another man who stood by him. " He's awake, Doctor. Please notice what he says."

The other man was bending over the seat in front, which now was empty of its passengers. Or it seemed to be. What was he looking at?

" You've been in this seat since New York," the guard informed Henderson. " What can you tell us about the man in front of you? Did you notice anything particular? Did you hear him say anything? Was he in a hurry to get off at North Philadelphia? "

Henderson rubbed his eyes. " I noticed the woman who was with him—I noticed her more than I did him."

He smiled foolishly. He knew he looked and sounded foolish,

because nobody smiled back. The guard didn't, and neither did the other doctor, who raised his head and looked over the seat-back as at one who had spoken out of turn. But there was no one else to rebuke his pleasantry.

He noticed now for the first time that this middle portion of the coach had been cleared of passengers. There was a knot of them at the forward end of the coach, and they were staring this way, though not at him. They were staring at the empty seat in front of him, trying to see down into it; but they were not close enough to do so, nor could they come any closer than they were, for an attendant was holding them back. What had happened? What was wrong?

The guard made it plain. "If you stand up," he said, "you can see the woman now. She's still here."

Henderson hesitated, then stood up just as the man did, the doctor. He had been bending over her. Henderson saw at once that she was dead.

Her body looked as if it had been driven into the corner by the immense force with which the knife had been used, the knife whose handle, still in place, was all that could be seen of it. Yet it was a slender knife, and it had needed no such force to drive it into her heart. She must have been trying to get away from it; and of course she couldn't.

He sat down again, stunned by what he had seen, so that he barely heard the guard repeat his questions. They were all about the fellow who had done this and disappeared. Of course they were the right questions, and he must try to answer them.

"I never saw anything but the back of his head," he heard himself saying at last. "He never looked at her and, so far as I know, he didn't say one word. She seemed to do all the talking. She was greatly interested in him, I thought, but from where I sat I couldn't see that she got anything out of him. I noticed this, and felt sorry for her."

"Er—yes," said the guard. "But what about North Philadelphia? Was there any commotion between Trenton and there?"

"I—I'm ashamed to say I went to sleep well before that. I can't tell you a thing. But I'm a doctor too, if that's any help. Dr. Henderson."

The guard jerked his head toward the other man, who smiled briefly. "Dr. Herzen," he said, and shook hands. "The guard brought me in from the next coach. They called for a doctor here, but of course you were asleep."

"Of course I was," said Dr. Henderson. "What a pity!" This sounded cold, he thought.

"I don't suppose you could have done anything," said Dr. Herzen, "at the moment you have in mind. The fellow was quick; it's hard to believe how he did it so quietly."

"They had tickets for Baltimore," put in the guard. "He probably planned it just as it happened. He slipped off at North Philly, leaving her—like this. We didn't begin to notice anything for a good half hour after that. She looked asleep, and if anybody thought of him they supposed he was up in the smoking-car. One of the attendants saw the blood, but the first thing to strike him was that she never moved—and the funny way she was doubled up. We're used to 'em taking about every position there is, but he did think this was queer."

"Where are we now?" asked Dr. Henderson.

"We'll be at Wilmington in ten minutes. She'll be removed there," said the guard.

Dr. Henderson looked down. The face was not very pale, and the eyes had been closed.

Those eyes! Or one of them, the one he had watched! What was it he had been thinking before he fell asleep? Oh, yes—and he looked intently at Dr. Herzen.

"Can I be of any service, doctor?" He said it with the routine inflection.

"Thank you, I think not. But if you care to come here and examine—"

"No! I'm sure you—but guard, what about the man who did this? Didn't anybody see him? Will there be any way—."

"That's for the police to look after. I guess we all saw him. But nobody's sure what he looked like. He was quiet; you say yourself he never turned his head. If I remember rightly, he was looking down when I took their tickets. I'm afraid we shan't be much use. I thought you'd be able to tell us something."

"I would recognize the back of his head anywhere on earth," said Dr. Henderson slowly.

"So would his mother. But I bet he's stopped seeing her."

"I get your point. But my God!" And he turned away from both men so suddenly that they stared at each other in astonishment.

He was remembering the beautiful clearness, the loving clearness, of a single human eye which he had seen—had seen, and then gone to sleep as if it were a slight thing after all. Oh, not so slight; for hadn't he dreamt about its owner? But he had slept.

And while he slept this thing had happened.

The lids had been closed by someone—Dr. Herzen—who

never saw what once had been between them. Beneath those lids, beginning now, the thing was happening that he had thought about before he slept. The brightness was going. The prism would admit no further sun.

That window glass—the doctor remembered how dusty it had been, and yet how much light it had let through to her; and then how she had sent it forth again. What she sent it with would soon enough be nothing but dust. The orb was already on its way to extinction. The socket, so huge, so sad—but he looked down again and saw no socket.

There was only her sleeping face, still not so pale as her hair above it, still harmonious, somehow, with the one flower on her hat, her small straw hat which someone had removed and placed neatly on the seat beside her.

What had *she* been like? He would never know. Her name? He wouldn't ask. He might hear it pretty soon, when the police came on the train.

Would he be expected to testify or anything? He knew nothing, except that her eyes—her eye—had been most beautiful. But any human eye is beautiful, he said.

And when did he learn that? When he saw hers. He wished she could hear him say so.

The guard touched his sleeve. The brakes had given their message, and gently the train began to slow down for Wilmington.

★ ★ ★

SOLUTIONS to TWO'S NOT COMPANY

on page 90

1. *W. S. Gilbert's crew of the Nancy Bell; T. S. Eliot's J. Alfred Prufrock*
2. *Good King Wenceslas, by John Mason Neale; the wife, in the ballad "My old man said, Follow the van"*
3. *Lars Porsena, from Macaulay's Horatius; the Traveller, from de la Mare's Listeners*
4. *W. B. Yeats's Fiddler of Dooney; Curley, in Rodgers and Hammerstein's Oklahoma!*
5. *G. K. Chesterton's Dónkey; John Webster's Duchess*
6. *Alfred Noyes's Bess; Mrs. Porter, from the music-hall song of that name*
7. *Claverhouse, in Scott's Bonny Dundee; the Queens, in Alice Through the Looking-Glass*

★ *At readers' special request, Gerald Kersh's vivid and memorable little Christmas story is chosen as this month's Argosy reprint.*

SOME OTHER STAR

BY GERALD KERSH

"WHEN you travel alone over those plains," said the dealer in perfumes, "it is just as well to take a few reliable men along with you. A couple of strong slaves armed with clubs are better than nothing. Me, I should never dream of setting out without a good sharp sword at my side, and a well-sharpened dagger up my sleeve, and a little escort of armed horsemen . . . say three or four. Only the other week we had a brush with bandits on a lonely road. But—"

"Excuse me," said his host, and left the room. He returned five minutes later, wringing his hands. "If only she comes through this all right . . . My God, if only she does . . ."

The dealer in perfumes smiled indulgently and said, "Have no fear. I was just the same when my first child was born; nervous, excitable. She is young and healthy. You have a good midwife. You are a decent man—you say your prayers, bless God at the prescribed times, and do your duty. Don't worry. Be thankful, rather, that your wife has a sound roof over her and a comfortable bed to lie in."

"If, please God, it is a son, I shall name him after my father, may his soul rest in peace."

"Please God it will be a son. And if it is a daughter, then be thankful just the same. A good woman is above rubies. This is a propitious time for a birth of any kind, let me assure you. Did I tell you what happened exactly a year ago tonight? Sit still; keep calm; listen, and take your mind off things for a few minutes.

"You know that I get about a good deal and know what is going on in the world. So, let me tell you about this time last year."

From a remote part of the house there sounded a short, sharp cry—a woman's cry. The young man stopped his ears.

"I was travelling," said the dealer in perfumes, "to Bethlehem, where I had some little business to transact with a Roman official—may worms eat him! The roads were choked with traffic. The population was on the move. Caesar—may he be covered with

boils from head to foot!—was taking a census. So we progressed very slowly, for there were thousands of people. At one point I nearly ran down a man and his wife, travelling at less than a slow foot-pace on the edge of the road—an old man and a young wife. I couldn't see her face; it was veiled, but she was riding on a poor old donkey, and it was easy to see that she was very near her time, poor girl.

" I made room for them on the road, since it is my custom to be civil to everyone. The old man thanked me very humbly, and led the donkey past. I saw how hopeless it was to try and make progress just then, so I paused, with my little bodyguard, by the side of the road, and sat down to rest and eat and drink a little, since it is my custom never to move a mile without a supply of food and wine.

" It was a clear evening. My men made a little fire. I was prepared to spend the night there, if necessary; since it is my custom always to be prepared with furs and rugs for such emergencies. Good. I was resting there by the little fire when I heard footsteps approaching. My men drew their swords, and cried, ' Who is there? ' A voice, speaking with a distinctly outlandish accent, said, ' Friends,' and an extremely queer-looking man came into the firelight. He was, I think, an Egyptian, very richly dressed. It is my custom to notice such things, and I can tell you that his robe alone, sold for half of what he paid for it, would have kept a family in comfort for five years. There were two others behind him—one very pale and the other very dark—not servants, but men like the Egyptian: men of substance, with an air of authority.

" The Egyptian spoke without ceremony. He said, ' You are known as Jochanaan the Perfumer.' I said, ' At your service, my lord. How did you know? ' He replied, ' It does not matter. We wish to purchase perfumes.' I said, ' Only too pleased. Wait just one little moment, and I'll show you some very rare articles, gentlemen, at the most advantageous prices . . .' Well, the long and short of it was that they bought a casket of the finest myrrh, another of the purest frankincense, and a quantity of cassia in an antique jar—without a word, mark you, without a word of argument over the prices—and paid in good Roman gold coin, and turned to go.

" But just before he went, the Egyptian—at least, I think he was an Egyptian—laid a hand on my arm and said, ' Your perfumes, my friend, are for the cradle of a King who is more than a King.' ' And who may he be? ' I asked, and he replied, ' He will be born this night.' ' Where? ' The Egyptian said nothing but pointed towards Bethlehem, and looked me full in the face in such

a way that I felt suddenly uneasy in my inside. Then they went away towards the town, and I spent the rest of the night by the fire, thinking odd thoughts. There was a strange star in the sky that night. It burnt after dawn, bright as oil.

" By the morning I was ready to go on. ' King,' I said, and laughed; then I tested the strangers' money with my teeth, just to make sure. It was quite all right. And so I went into Bethlehem and did my little stroke of business. And then I heard the news.

" It appears that the old man with the young wife was a carpenter called Joseph, of the house of David. He couldn't get rooms in the town, and thought himself pretty lucky to find a stable for the night. And there his wife gave birth to a son. Well, imagine his surprise when, just after the baby was washed, my three strangers came in, and fell on their knees, and laid before the new-born infant the very perfumes they had bought from me the same night. It seems that they had some sign, some omen, some warning, that a Prophet—some say the Messiah—was to be born in such-and-such a place. And the star I saw had travelled in front of them, leading them to the spot. So there you are, my young friend: it only goes to show.

" To most people, a new-born babe is a new-born babe, and nothing more; but that same child may be a prophet, a priest, or a king. So who can tell? The good God may have reserved something special for your first-born, also. Have no fear, therefore. Drink a cup of wine."

There was silence for a while. Suddenly the young man leapt to his feet, ran to the door, and listened. The dealer in perfumes, listening also, heard the thin, clear, indefinably woeful wail of a baby forcing out its first breath of air.

The midwife entered. " Good luck! " she said. " You have a fine, strong son. And your wife is as well as I am."

The young man burst into tears of joy and cried, " Thank God! Praise God! "

" What did I tell you? " said the dealer in perfumes, smiling with an air of personal accomplishment.

The young man said, " I shall name him after my father, may his soul rest in peace. I shall call him Judas."

" Simon Iscariot, accept my congratulations," said the dealer in perfumes.

★ ★ ★

YEARS OF FAME

It took me fifteen years to discover that I had no talent for writing, but I couldn't give it up because by that time I was too famous.

ROBERT BENCHLEY

THERE had been only a few people on the plane from Barcelona. They walked ahead of him now, all hunched against the evening drizzle, their long, oblique shadows thrown back to him by the floodlights on the face of the airport buildings.

He followed them up the steps into the hallway. His eyes went round the place looking for her.

Lining the shadowed benches was a still fresco of waiting figures . . . an old man, his feet up on a cardboard case, a shabby parcel tied to the handle; a young peasant couple, hand in hand, the boy's face wary and distrustful; a guardia civil leaning against a pillar picking his teeth.

Maybe she's in the bar, he thought. He went across to the right, the grit on his shoes from the wet runway grating on the tiles. There was a smell of cigar smoke and scent and coffee and cognac.

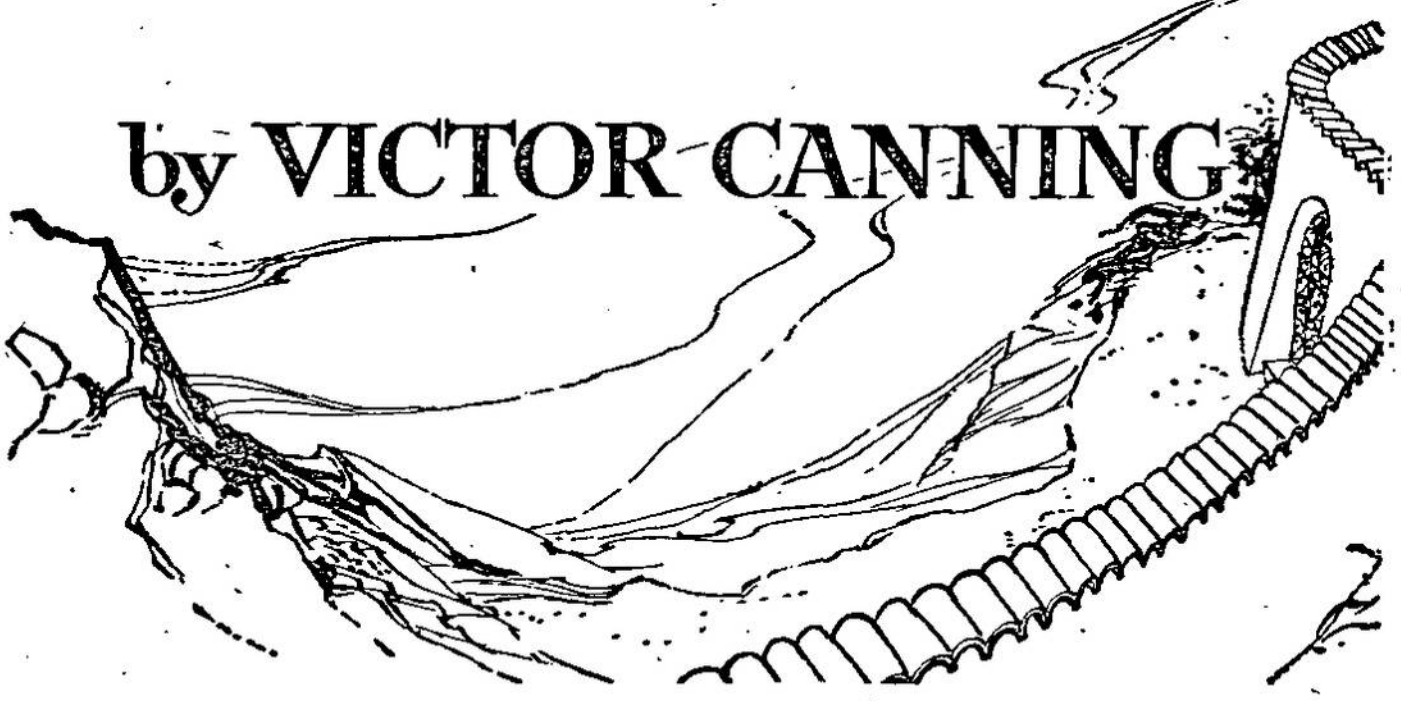
She wasn't there.

Usually she would be standing in the waiting-hall, in her long white coat, bare-headed, the soft pale hair looking as though it had just been brushed, and then there would be the good moment when she saw him and came eagerly to him.

Smiling at his disappointment, he went out into the drizzle, into the forecourt of the airport. Five or six taxis stood there, their curved roofs shining under the rain, the little bunches of scarlet and gold ribbon at their radiator caps and mirrors drooping like seaweed. There will be sun tomorrow, he thought. Hard,

Manasco Road

by VICTOR CANNING



Gripping new novel of love and danger under a Spanish sun

chromium-plated sun, and everyone will forget the rain. A driver got up from a running-board and came towards him. His face was like old cork bark and the drizzle silvered the shoulders of his suit.

"Taxi, señor? Palma?"

The touting tone vanished as the driver recognized him. "Señor Thorne! Welcome, welcome."

"Hullo, Jaime. Have you seen my wife around?"

"No, señor. She has not been here."

Thorne handed him his baggage ticket and waited while he went to collect his big case.

Jaime drove him into Palma, one hand on the wheel, the other on the horn, and talking all the way. Thorne only half listened, for in imagination he was ahead, in the flat at the top of the old building behind the Cathedral and the Almudaina Palace.

The wheels sang on the wet road. A tram came up into the headlights. Buildings began to gather round them. Jaime's voice came back to him. The bullfights had been lousy. The Guardia Civil had picked up a fishing-boat with nearly two million cigarettes aboard . . .

And Thorne was thinking, it is good to come back. It is good to have something, someone, to come back to.

On the far side of the Plaza de España he made Jaime stop. He

got out and went into a flower shop. An old woman with twisted, puffy hands sold him twelve roses; apricot-coloured, like the ones his father used to grow at the villa. The old woman took an age arranging the flowers and his impatience showed. Handing them to him, she said, " If it were me, señor, and forty years back, you could have come without the flowers and been welcome. A man has only one gift a woman needs."

She held his hundred-peseta note up to the light and jerked at it with a sudden movement of the puffed hands to prove its worth.

Jaime took the car rattling and clattering over the cobbles up the hill to the Cathedral. Thorne sat in the darkness, holding the roses in his hands carefully.

Jaime drew up outside the house. The street light and the rain veneered the baroque stone facings and the tall, narrow entrance with blue and grey gleams.

Thorne paid him off and went in out of the rain, hearing the car draw away, and up the dark stairs. The last flight, unable to withhold his impatience, he took at a run.

He opened the door with his key and in the dark hall dropped his case to the ground.

" Katy! Hi, Kate! "

He waited for one of the doors to open, for a yellow patch of light to fall across the darkness. But there was no movement.

" Kate! "

The darkness filled with the echoes of his voice.

Hell. She was out. That meant that she hadn't got his message that he was coming back. He switched on the hall lights.

The place was full of her. There was a sherry decanter on the sitting-room table. Wine flies had drowned themselves in the dregs of two glasses.

A newspaper was crumpled on the floor by the window. She was untidy, used things and threw them down. Untidy because she had all the time in the world to be orderly. He folded the paper neatly and then fixed himself a glass of whisky. The clock in the hallway struck ten. He went through into the bedroom, carrying his glass.

Face down on the end of their bed was an open book and perched near it a large ashtray. He had a sudden picture of her lying there, reading, and for a second or two there was a keen sense in him of the time on her hands, the twenty-four-hour padding of each day. On the dressing-table was a sealed envelope addressed to their daughter: *Miss Julia Thorne, Hawkhurst School, Kent, Inglaterra* . . . The autumn winds would be turning cold in England now. He pictured Julia wrapped in a green school cape, and the end of her nose shining.

He went into the bathroom and began to run a bath. Another book was open on the shelf below the mirror. She read three or four at a time, propped open about the house. A girdle, damp from recent washing, hung on the expanding rail of his shaving-mirror over the basin.

He stripped, whistling to himself as the bath ran.

The long mirror above the bath showed a tall, easy-going figure, no flabbiness, the brown skin hard and polished. He stopped whistling as he ran a hand over his chin, wondering if he should shave. Travelling always brought the stubble out. He decided to let it go. Kate would take him as he was. With the thought he smiled and the whistle began again, gently.

Suddenly he was reminded of his father; the old man had had a Red Indian look, the planes of cheek flesh like hard teak; a stern face until the smile came into the blue eyes and the mouth twisted, spilling over with humour. Everyone said he was like his father. At thirty-five he didn't mind looking like him, but he hoped that was as far as it would go. While he lived he had loved him, but the old man, the black sheep of his family who had gone to live in Spain, had left his children few illusions . . . browsing always on the slopes of bankruptcy.

Thorne raised his hands, scratching at the soft brown short-cut hair. Well, he'd done better than the old man, but not much. Enough, though. Enough to buy Kate a new dress when she wanted one; to give her a good time. He leaned forward, grunting, and touched his toes. There were two of Kate's hairgrips on the floor. He picked them up. Holding them, and thinking of Kate, he said contentedly to himself, Well, I may not be a successful man, but at least I'm a happy one.

He got into the bath and lay back, finishing his whisky. He lay there and he knew what it was to be content. It was something a man had to live long to discover. He'd had it for ten years. Knowing it was waiting for him when he came back after a week, a month, or two months . . . a wife and a child. Always there. Until he had met Kate he had never known what that meant, never been sure what he was coming back to find.

It was eleven o'clock when he got into bed. He read for a while, taking up her book and going on with it from the place she had left open. He got the impression that the people in it were wearing themselves out over trivialities, that their whole trouble could have been blown apart with one honest sentence.

When he woke up, the light was still on and she was standing by the side of the bed. She must have been shaking his shoulder for her hand was outstretched between them. The loose silver chain on her wrist was still swinging, the soft pale hair was a little forward and the edge of the coloured silk shawl over her bare shoulders had slipped.

For a moment there were no words in him. Only the thought. This is Kate. This is Kate, always. She was the frightened girl with fifty pesetas to her name in a Barcelona café, the woman who met hunger in him . . . the thing which went beyond a body and a personality. She was right, utterly right for him. You couldn't say it any other way. Everything was right; the shape, the look, the feel, the pattern she made in his mind and his eye.

He grabbed her wrist. " You devil, why didn't you come to meet me? "

" Devil yourself. Why didn't you let me know you were coming? "

" I did. Through Peroni."

" He's away."

" Blast him." He could feel the pulse beating in her wrist. " Where've you been all the evening? "

" With the Stanways. It's their last night in Majorca."

" Come and be forgiven."

He pulled her down and she lay across him, her hands framing his face, the fingers hard on his flesh. Then they moved, pulling at his short brown hair. She turned her head away, laughing as he searched for her mouth. The pearl drops of one of her earrings swept across his face.

" You'll ruin this dress."

He held her as she laughed and struggled. And then the laughter was suddenly gone as he found her mouth and the struggle in her turned towards him eagerly.

Later, much later, in the darkness he was awake again. The morning was coming. He could hear the distant put-put of a motor boat down in the harbour. Somewhere in the cathedral towers a jackdaw swore lazily against the coming dawn. Out in the country the bullock carts would be moving and the lorries loading for the town's markets. Pimento, aubergine, young lettuce, tomatoes, fennel and stout sticks of celery, and on the fish quays the shapeless grey-black spread of octopus. I love it all, he thought.

He lay there, content with the darkness and warmth and the nearness of Kate. His hand was on her arm as he listened to her breathing. Once she stirred and spoke in her sleep. " Nick," she said, " Oh, Nick, Nick . . ." She sounded as though she were pleading with him and that was a thing she had never had to do.

Tomorrow, he thought, he'd turn all the papers over to Peroni. Then he'd pack the car and take her up to Perada. It was still warm enough to bathe and lie in the sun. He saw her pale hair against the sand, the pines running up to a sky as blue as her eyes.

He lay there watching the sky lighten, cushioned by the silent communion between them, knowing now that she was awake, aware of the change in the rhythm of her breathing. The stillness which was between them and the waiting spirit in their minds reminded him of his young brother. For this had been the moment of their confidences, the early-morning gloom and the world poised between the last grumble of sleep and the rawness of waking. Hector was dead—no one knew how or where for certain; drowned, it was thought, as a prisoner of war.

And now out of the darkness came Kate's voice, as secret and loved as Hector's had been. " Nick? "

" Yes? "

" Awake? "

" No."

" Then what are you thinking about? " He put his hand on her bare shoulder and she took one of his fingers in the way a small child will.

" I was thinking of Hector."

" Oh." She was silent and he wondered what she was thinking. She hadn't known Hector and she had met his father only once. All that was shut away from her. Could that make a woman jealous, to be shut out of part of a man's life? When she told him things from her past, laying out the small fragments of happiness and memory, he was always jealous, wanting to have shared it with her.

She said slowly, " Nick—just how well off are we? "

" We eat. I manage to pay most of my bills. What do you want? A new dress? "

" No, not that."

He smiled to himself. She reached out to the bedside table and found matches and a cigarette. Just for a moment in the flame the room swayed into life. She drew on the cigarette and he saw the pink glow moulding her arm exotically against the gloom and he remembered her in cabaret just before they were married, dancing, arms raised against the shadows with the rose-pink of table lamps on her. He reached out, took the cigarette and drew on it. As he handed it back, she went on, " I mean, how would we stand if you sold up? "

" You mean quit? "

" Yes."

" I don't know. I suppose Peroni would give me about two thousand quid for my share. If he could find it. We never have much cash reserve, you know. It's mostly goodwill and a bank overdraft. Where's this leading? "

" Nowhere." Her voice was flat.

" Come clean, Kate."

Almost as though she hadn't heard him, she went on. " I've got three pounds a week from those shares—"

" Two-ten. They were three."

" Julia's growing."

" It's a habit of the young." But she didn't laugh. He waited, knowing something was coming, but not disturbed. She had to come at it her way and he knew how to be patient.

" You like it here? " she asked.

" Of course. Don't you? "

" You like Spain, or the Spanish? Or that business of yours? Or the weather? Or the cheap wine? Or what is it you like? "

" I like it." He was frowning in the dark, puzzled.

" All of it? "

" I suppose so."

He could feel her head half nod against the pillow as though she were telling herself that this was what she had thought, that it was as she expected and not to be argued or beaten down.

Abruptly she said, " Sometimes I feel if I hear anyone else say

buenos días, señora, or hasta la vista, or any word in Spanish, I'll scream. Just scream. And shout God Save the Queen, or something."

He propped himself up on one elbow and took the cigarette from her. "What on earth's got into you, Kate?"

"I don't know—maybe I need a change."

He put his arm round her shoulders and kissed her. "Then you shall have it. We'll pack the car this morning and go up to Perada for a while."

"Perada!" And then as he kissed her again she added a Spanish adjective to Perada and he drew back laughing. "Kate!"

"Well, that's how I feel. I don't want to go to Perada."

"Then somewhere else. Where do you want to go?"

"I want to go to England."

"Well . . . I don't know. We might arrange a trip around Christmastime, perhaps. Yes, why not?" The last phrase was to himself almost. She was close to him, she was with him still, her face resting against his arm, but there was a newness in her which couldn't be explained by any of the obvious thoughts that came into his mind.

"Yes, we'll take a trip at Christmas and pick Julia up and go off somewhere together. Brighton, Cornwall—anywhere you like."

"I don't want a trip. I want to go back to England to stay."

"But we've had all this before. We can't go back for good without something behind us."

"I know—it was just a nice thought."

It was much lighter now and he could see her face clearly. She wasn't looking at him. She was staring straight ahead of her and her face showed nothing except the gentle bleakness of early morning. He leaned over and, wishing he could give her all the things she wanted, kissed her shoulder.

It was six o'clock when Domingo Peroni telephoned from the office. This was no surprise to Thorne. Domingo had no idea of time. He did things when he felt like it or when he had no further excuses left for avoiding them.

"Nick, can you get down here right away?"

"Is it necessary?"

"Yes."

He got up, grumbling, leaving Kate in bed, and deciding to shave when he came back.

"Domingo should have a wife," said Kate drowsily. "It would give him a respect for regular habits . . ."

For offices they had two rooms on a third floor overlooking the Paseo Generalissimo Franco. Walking down the hill from the Cathedral, he had a glimpse of the harbour. The wind made a dry, brittle sound in the top-hamper of the palms. The sky was hard and clear like a blue diamond and the sun was warm on his back.

Turning up the Paseo, he was thinking about Kate wanting to

go to England. Well, who didn't, really? He'd quite like to go, too. But not without a bean in his pocket. He could have done more about that if Kate would have let him. But she was a hell of a girl for honesty.

Tangier, for instance. Six or seven years before, he had been over there for three months. Those were the days when he and Peroni had been really tight for money, when the rashness and piracy of his war years were still with him and a few risks hadn't seemed out of place. Mediterranean business life always had that tinge—a little bribery, a dark night, and a fast boat to get round customs interference. But when he'd come back she'd given him hell. So he'd given up the Tangier trips and the lucrative business of importing American cigarettes.

A pity . . . that way they could have been in England years ago. Since that Tangier trip he had been a reasonably honest business man. Peroni was always grumbling about it.

He turned into the hallway of the office building. Their board in the stair recess read *Peroni & Thorne, Importers and Exporters.* It didn't mean much, but they managed to survive and even flourish a little by snapping up the marginal titbits. Going up the stairs now, remembering Kate's conversation, it struck him strongly that ten years was a long time in which to have got nowhere in particular. The groove was too worn and too well known.

He went into the office. Peroni's room was a mess: papers and samples all over the place. The hard sun shafts falling through the window showed up the dust.

Peroni had an electric coffee percolator bubbling on the desk and he was spreading peach preserve on a roll with a silver paper-knife. The smell of peach was strong.

"Nick! Welcome. Have a good trip?"

"Reasonable. We might make two hundred quid out of it."

"We're going to do better than that."

"That's our motto. We're always going to do better. You got me down here at this hour for that?"

"Sure."

Peroni was a plump man, but there wasn't a grey hair in the thick curly crop on his head, though he could give Thorne ten years. He was alive and overcharged; happy, generous, and not to be trusted.

He sat back in his chair and sipped at his hot coffee. "Only got back late last night, Nick. Too late to disturb you. But at last we're in. Strictly honest business, and over two thousand quid to be made in a month. Like it?"

"Get down to details." But he did like it. Who wouldn't?

"It's your kind of job, Nick. Remember, just before you went away, a ship ran aground up north, near Puerto Regano?"

"I do. An old French tub, due for scrap. She was on the Palma-Marseilles run when I was a boy."

"That's the one. Don't ask me why she went aground. Maybe the crew was drunk, or maybe the owners wanted the insurance

rather than the scrap value. The point is we've got a chance to buy the cargo, salvage it, and sell it to Vargiu at a fat profit."

"Elisio Vargiu?"

"I know he's a crook. But he's also my mother's cousin, and there's a contract he can't break—so long as we deliver within the month. By laying out just under two thousand pounds we'll be able to sell the stuff for four. It's from heaven!" Peroni kissed his fingers, and then prolonged the gesture to lick peach jam from them.

Thorne stood up. It could be from heaven, and it could be from some other place. One thing was certain: it could never be a simple, uncomplicated deal. Not with Vargiu and Peroni in it. However, he was used to that kind of maze. Two thousand pounds' profit had a bright ring to it.

"Where would we get two thousand pounds to lay out in order to make four?"

"One way and another I've scraped just enough. I've put up every bit of security, every asset we own."

"We'll have operating costs."

"Credit—and they won't be big. Nick, this could be a turning-point. The cargo belongs to the original shippers in France. It's up for auction and I can get our bid taken."

He didn't ask how Peroni could get his bid taken at a public auction. Any office boy in Spain could answer that. Somewhere, far back in the darkness of his mind, a light had begun to wink.

"What is the cargo?"

"Steel frames for doors and windows, and hardware. Nothing the sea can have hurt."

"Why doesn't Vargiu bid at the auction and then salvage the stuff himself?"

Peroni waved his hands. "Can you imagine it? Vargiu's got a contract for the new airfield installations outside Palma. His hands are full. To him, this little cargo is unimportant. But he is my mother's cousin and he would like to help me."

"Not if it costs him a cent."

"Maybe—but it doesn't, Nick. So long as we deliver by the end of the month, it's all right. If we don't—then the deal's off. He'll start making up wooden frames and buying locally. He's got a big job on his hands, Nick. We can't grumble at a time clause."

"Will he sign an agreement to take this stuff if we deliver on time?"

Peroni smiled. "I am no child, Nick. He has already done that. I had to have such an agreement before I would bid at the auction. It is all here, signed and sealed. What do you say? Shall we bid for it?"

Peroni sat there beaming at him. His fat, smooth face had a plastic bloom so unlike flesh that—Kate had once said—you felt that on the back of his neck you'd find a stamped warning that patents were pending for the product.

He didn't answer right away. Not because he didn't know what to say. He knew that it was a risk that neither he nor Domingo could resist taking. They'd do it because it was in their nature to do it. On the surface it was as straightforward as anything could be out here— The light at the back of his mind was a fine glow now— Normally he and Domingo worked like blacks on small commission deals, but this was something big. With the money he could make from this there was a lot he could do.

" You've got a report on the condition of this boat and the cargo? "

" Sure, Nick." Peroni began to search among the mess on his desk. " Everything, including the cargo manifest. She's practically high and dry. Here." He handed a bunch of papers across, and then went on, " What do you say, Nick? Is it a good thing? You're in? "

Thorne nodded. " It's a good thing, and I'm in. But I'll bet there are snags. Anyway, I'll go up and have a look at her today."

Peroni stood up and, extending his plump little arms, did a slow gavotte around the desk. Outside, a tram rattled by and a flight of pigeons went past the window, flecking the sunlight on the floor with rapid shadows.

" Nick, you do me good. For a time I am worried because not always can I be sure of you. Now I can tell you."

Thorne looked up. Here it came.

" Tell me what? "

" That already I have done it. The auction was the day before yesterday, and I bid, and got the cargo."

Thorne didn't say anything.

" You are angry, Nick? "

" No, you old rogue. But I hope you're not holding anything else from me? "

" Nothing, Nick! " Peroni put his hands on the lapels of his jacket and pulled them apart as though he would expose his innocent heart to the world.

Thorne stood up. " Now, I'll tell you something. My share in this business is worth about two thousand. Half-share in the cargo profit will be another thousand. When this job is done, I'm clearing out. We'll have four thousand in the kitty. I'll take my three thousand and you can look for another partner—"

" But Nick—"

" Save it, Domingo. We get on fine, but you could do better with someone else. Someone who won't mind the cigarette and penicillin deals. Someone who doesn't have a wife like Kate."

He had expected Peroni to fight it, but he was mistaken. The man drew his hand across his face and left it a rather solemn mask. He nodded his head and then said gravely, " I've seen it coming for a long time, Nick. Maybe, clearer than you. Born in Spain, raised in Spain—and you love it. But here, Nick "—with his index finger he tapped his heart—" here, a man always wants to go back, for one reason or another. I understand, Nick. But this

job first, eh? Otherwise we go broke." He smiled as though the prospect were delightfully remote.

Shaving, with the door open into the bedroom, Nick thought it over. He hadn't said anything to Kate yet.

Wiping the lather from his face, he called, "Come on, you lazy slut. Get out of that bed."

"What for? I like it here. Come and join me."

"I'm a working man. Domingo wants me to go up to Puerto. I'm taking you and we're leaving in half an hour."

"Is it business?"

"Yes."

"Oh . . ." The sound made a hole through which all her interest escaped.

"Don't you want to come?"

"I want to be with you, yes. But I should have thought your first day could have been free." Her voice sounded far away.

"I can't put it off."

He stood there, wondering whether to tell her. It would bring her to life. But it wasn't the moment. When you'd lived with someone as long as he had with Kate, when you loved someone, it was easy to tell when the reception between you was bad. She kept fading and going away from him.

He began to clean his razor with a small towel. Even the silence between them was awkward. He found himself waiting for her to say something and when she didn't he said casually, "How were the Stanways?"

"Who?"

"The Stanways."

"Oh, them. Just the same."

In the silence that followed he could hear the tiny rasp of an emery board as she lay in bed doing her nails. Maybe, he decided, that was the trouble. The Stanways were off to England that morning after their holiday. They'd stirred something in her. Something had slipped into her voice when she had said, "Oh, them. Just the same."

He frowned at himself in the mirror. "Come on, you've got to get ready."

"All right. I've plenty of time while you fetch the car."

Damn it, he thought, what's happening?

He laid the razor down on the shelf under the bathroom mirror. As he did so he knocked over the book which she had left propped there. It fell to the ground with a crash and took with it a small bottle of nail polish. As he picked them up, she called, "Don't break the place up."

"Books all over the damn place."

She laughed. The sound brought her back.

Putting the book on the shelf, he noticed the ear-rings she had been wearing when she came in. They lay on the shelf as she had taken them off. He remembered the cold touch of the pearls on

his face as he had pulled her down to him. He picked up one of them now. There was a little cluster of bright stones and then three pearls hanging from them. " Haven't seen these before," he said.

" What's that? "

" These ear-rings. They're nice."

" Oh, those . . . I got them in town. They're only cheap costume pieces. But attractive. Be an angel, Nick, and run my bath."

He walked to the bath, put in the plug, and turned the hot tap. But in one hand he still held an ear-ring. It was in him now, the real disturbance. If she hadn't asked him to run the bath, asking it quickly, throwing it in to cover what should have been unimportant enough to stand by itself, then he might never have known, might never have looked a second time. You can't live with someone for years and years and not come to know the nuances of truth and evasion, he thought. Not with Kate, anyway. And now he felt himself abruptly ruthless and practical.

Trouble, he told himself, was best faced. He didn't believe the Stanways had kept her company last night. And he didn't believe the ear-rings were cheap costume pieces. He and Peroni had handled that kind of stuff for a while and there was a difference in feel and texture, in the look and the setting, which he had come to recognize. These pearls were real, and there were tiny diamonds in the setting. What the hell was Kate playing at?

He went through into the sitting-room. The first thing he saw was the silver tray with the sherry decanter and two glasses. There should have been three glasses. Both the Stanways took sherry and so did Kate.

He stood there, lost. He went back into the bedroom. Kate was in the bath, singing gently to herself, and momentarily the sound eased the sickness in him, warming the numbness which was as confusing to him as a sudden pain to a child.

He went in to her. She looked up. " Darling," she said, " have I told you how nice it is to have you back? Even though it means I'll have to keep the flat tidy. And I love you. Come and give me a kiss."

He went over and bent down and kissed her shiny forehead and it was right. It had to be right, he told himself. The thing was between them, the thing that was as proper to them as a bud to a branch.

Going to the mirror to straighten his hair, through which she had run wet fingers, he said, " I'll get the car. Better pack a bag with some night-clothes for us. We may have to stay. I'll blow the horn when I get back."

He went out. In his pocket were the two ear-rings. In his mind was the picture of her lying there, the long brown body, her eyes shining, and her lips pouting to take his kiss.

Yesterday, he thought, I was looking forward to coming back; knowing Kate would be there and with her the whole parcel of things loved and sure. It was always one of the high moments in

his life with her . . . Until today. Walking in the sun he was tempted to do nothing about it. Put his head in the sand. But he knew he wouldn't. It wasn't his way.

He turned into a coffee bar, and after ordering he went across to the telephone. He called the Hotel Victoria. The Stanways always stayed there. The clerk told him that the Stanways had left for England on the afternoon plane the previous day.

He drank his coffee and ordered another. Another would keep him there longer. There was a reluctance in him to move, as though he could see the pattern laid out ahead and didn't want to follow it.

Behind the bar a waiter switched on a radio. A fat tenor voice, turned asthmatic by the regular hiss of the espresso machine, filled the place. Go to hell, he said to himself . . . One hand in his pocket was fingering the ear-ring.

He blew the horn outside the flat. After a while Kate came down with a suitcase. He jumped out, took it from her, and dropped it into the back of the car.

She was wearing a green linen suit, and with the gentle morning breeze playing across her hair she looked young and crisp, like a lettuce leaf, looked the way that added an extra inch to a man's height from pride to have her by his side. Fantasy, he told himself; sheer bloody fantasy. This kind of thing just couldn't happen between them. As they drove across town she chatted away at his side, and, listening to her, he told himself there couldn't be anything wrong. How could there be? Not between Kate and himself.

"You're very silent, Nick," she said after a while. "Brooding over the job? Has Domingo landed you with a sticky one?"

"Could be."

"Domingo's a pirate type." She laughed. "Can you see him with a patch over one eye?"

He said suddenly, "Kate dear, I want to have a talk with you."

"Talk away then."

"Not while I drive." He saw her look across at him curiously and he smiled, but it was as though he hadn't smiled in years and his cheek muscles were stiff and awkward.

He found a track, bordered by fig trees, and he pulled the car into it. Ahead of them, at a hidden farm, a dog began to bark. He sat with his brown hands spread on the wheel and he stared at the smooth metallic green of the trees. How the hell did a man begin a thing like this?

"Kate dear . . ."

"Yes, Nick?" That part was easy. But what now? She sat there, silent, waiting for him. She was no longer just his wife, his woman, with ten shared years of living together held as common property between them. He was suddenly aware of another Kate —a person with thoughts he would never share; with emotions, maybe, that could never be stirred by him, a part of herself held

away for herself. It was easy to forget that in marriage. You knew about it in yourself, of course, but you forgot about it in the other partner.

Her voice low, and now clearly concerned, she said, "What is it, Nick darling?"

"It's us."

"What on earth do you mean?"

"I think you know what I mean."

"But I don't, Nick." He half turned and stared at her. She met his look with a little frown and he tried to tell himself that he could be wrong, that there was nothing in all his fears. But he knew Kate, knew that if she had decided on a certain way to handle a thing she would stick to it.

He pulled out his cigarette case and opened it. Kate took one and as he held his lighter to her he wondered why so much of his embarrassment should be in his body, making his hands awkward and clumsy.

"Don't beat about the bush, Kate. You weren't with the Stanways last night—"

"But I was."

"No, Kate. They left yesterday afternoon. I phoned their hotel and found that out."

He saw the expression on her face change. With a nervous movement she jerked her cigarette into the ditch and the movement sent a shiver of sunlight over her bright hair. Then she stared straight ahead of her. He saw her lips begin to tremble. Fleetingly there was in her face all the uncertainty and forlorn beauty that he had seen that day long ago on their first meeting in Barcelona.

He put his hand gently on her arm. "Let's go and sit under one of the trees over there. It's too hot in this car." He went round and opened the car door for her. With his hand on her arm they walked to the shade of a tree and sat down.

She said huskily, "How could you know?"

"There were only two sherry glasses out on the tray." He took her wrist, holding it firmly. "Let's get one thing straight, Kate. I love you. You're the only thing that matters to me. That's why I want the truth. It's not only the Stanways. It's this as well." As he spoke he took out the ear-ring and dropped it into her lap.

She didn't touch it. She just looked down at it and there was an echo of innocent surprise in her voice as she said, "But why on earth should this say anything? They're just a cheap pair. I could have bought them anywhere."

"Really, Kate!" He kicked at the hard ground with his heel. "You don't expect me to believe that? And anyway, you never bought them—did you?" He knew what was coming and he could feel his body taut, each muscle strained against an invisible pull.

"No . . . no, I didn't." she said miserably.

He stood up, his body restless, and anger spreading in his mind. "A man gave them to you?"

She nodded. He shut his eyes momentarily. She was telling him this. His Kate. He didn't want to be angry. It wouldn't help. But there was a fury in him that he held down like a secret agony.

"Are you in love with this man?" He couldn't help it, his voice was loud and angry.

"No, of course I'm not." She came to her feet quickly. "If I were, it would be easy. I wouldn't have tried to keep anything from you. I'm in love with you. That's what makes the whole thing so bloody . . . makes me feel so horrible!"

"You mean if I hadn't found out you wouldn't have told me?"

"Of course not. Why should I make you wretched as well as myself? I want to forget it."

"I don't understand you." He breathed deeply, feeling the sun-warm air filling his lungs but giving him no relief against the stifling fury in him. "You wanted to keep it from me, and yet you leave things about. Damn it, they're worth at least fifty pounds! A man doesn't give a woman a present like that because he likes the colour of her eyes." Inside him there was a warm, astringent uncoiling of fury.

"But he told me they were a cheap pair that had taken his eye in a shop."

"Taken his eye!" he cried. "And you'd taken his eye, too! Any shop girl in Palma would know their value. And you come bouncing back from him wearing them and promptly get into bed with me."

She faced him, as angry as he now. "You make it sound beastly," she said.

"Well, isn't it?" He moved away from her.

"Please, Nick—" she caught at his arm—"let me try to explain. Don't judge me until you know everything."

"I know all I want to know."

"You don't. We've been married ten years and you still don't know. Two or three times every year you go away for a month, two months, and you know nothing about the Kate who gets left behind. What happens to her? Do you know what happens to her? You think you do, but you don't. I'm a nice feeling in your mind, someone who's going to be there when you come back—but you don't miss me as I miss you."

"Of course I miss you."

"Not in the way I do. You've got your work, and you like it. You don't get so bored you could slash the pictures or let the bath run over just to have something happen. I get bored and bottled up."

"But, damn it, you've got friends and you belong to clubs. And you've had Julia to look after."

"It's not always enough. Not for me, anyway. I suppose I'm like that. I need people. I can't stand by myself like you. I miss you far more than you miss me."

"That's not so."

"But it is, Nick. That's the whole point. I know you miss me, but it's not in the way I miss you." She broke off for a moment and he could see the beginning of tears in her eyes. "It's so difficult to explain and I know I'm not doing it well, but try and be patient, Nick dear. Don't you ever while you're away find yourself thinking of me and suddenly find yourself full of . . . Oh God, how can I describe it? Nothing to do with sex. Just an awful ache. Usually I sit and think about you, read your letters, or daydream."

"Well, I can see that. But hundreds of women put up with that without—"

"Of course they do! So do I. But just this once everything went wrong. You like a man, you dance with him, talk to him. And that's how it stays—"

"Then why not this time?"

"Maybe because I was too sure of myself. I knew it couldn't happen—and then suddenly the thing was out of my control. Do try and see it, Nick. It just wasn't me at all. It was some traitor in me. It can happen like that. One half of you can't believe it, and the other half is a complete stranger to you. No, I can see," there was an exhausted bitterness in her voice—bitterness that belonged to her—not to him, "you don't know what I'm talking about."

"All I know is that I miss you, just as much as you miss me. But I don't go round jumping into bed with other women."

"Neither do I with other men!". Anger came into her voice swiftly. "It happened once and I hate myself for it. I can't put the reasons down in black and white for you. Maybe no one could. It's just a horrible trick that life plays now and again. Maybe because you get too smug and so sure that this kind of thing can't happen to *you*. All I know is that, although you're the only person in the world I love, it happened. Almost as though it were a punishment for being too happy, too much in love."

"Who was he?" His anger was still there, but he had it well under control now. Just listening to Kate, full of confusion as she tried to explain, touched him sharply. He couldn't understand why it should have happened. But he caught the echo of truth in her words. Human beings weren't perfect. Put too much strain on them and they cracked. It had to be accepted, endured . ...

"Tell me who he was." As though it made any difference, he thought.

"He's an American. He works in the Military section of their Embassy in Madrid. He was over here for a month on some jo and I met him at the Yacht Club."

"Where is he now?"

"He flew back to Madrid this morning."

"And his name?"

"Ray Asherton."

"What do you mean, *Ray*? Raymond?"

"Yes." It was odd how deep that went, the use of a nickname.

She was right, there was a whole life belonging to her that he knew nothing about. He could follow her, could understand what she had explained. He wasn't a fool. But understanding wasn't acceptance. The thing between them wasn't entirely subject to reason and logic. He knew the passion that could be roused in her by him. He could understand the hunger that waited there while he was away. He shut his eyes, as though to blind his imagination, and the effort drove pain through him.

"I don't know." The dull words were the nearest he could come to expressing his real despair.

"You don't know what?"

"What I feel. You can't take in this kind of thing in five minutes and know your mind. The only thing I feel like at this moment is giving you a damned good hiding and going over to Madrid and— Does this bastard think he's in love with you?"

"Yes. But he knows quite clearly how I feel. I shan't see him again and the whole thing is dead."

Thorne watched a cart creak and lurch towards the main road. He was no young man in love for the first time. He was old enough to know how to take the unexpected blow, how to cover up and ride the pain until strength came back. There was too much between Kate and himself, too much love and understanding, even to think of throwing everything away.

He put his hand on her arm. Suddenly his grasp tightened and he jerked her towards him roughly. Her head went back and he saw that her eyes were full of tears. She began to say something but he cut her short, his voice curt and hard with emotion: "All right, Kate. All right. It's over. Let's get away from this damned place." He slid his arm round her shoulder and began to lead her away . . .

That she should be there. That she should give love. That was what he had asked of her. But she was right. Never while he was away had he asked himself what happened to her. He'd taken it for granted that she was there, waiting for him. It had never occurred to him that in her loneliness and hunger another man could wake, even transiently, in her the response which he had always imagined was uniquely his.

He opened the car door for her and as she moved to it and close to him, he pulled her to him and kissed her. He could feel her tremble with the uncertainty of him in her, and he held her tighter.

"Nick," she said, as he let her go. "Nick . . . will it be all right?"

He touched her cheek with the back of his hand gently. "Don't worry, Kate. We'll be all right."

They reached Puerto Regano in time for lunch. Over coffee in the lounge of the Hotel Margarita, while Kate leafed through a magazine, Thorne went over Peroni's papers. For the moment the heart had been taken out of this trip. He was in no mood to tell Kate about it, to point out that if it came off they could go to

England. At the moment they weren't travelling anywhere. Just going round and round like a couple of leaves caught on the slow circle of a whirlpool.

The ship had gone aground on the north side of the Perada peninsula. Thorne knew the coast. Great cliffs went up two or three hundred feet, cut here and there by a few unprotected inlets. The position of the ship was marked on a map among the papers. To reach it he would have to take a rough road that ran over a low shoulder of hill behind the town and then fell away through a narrow valley to the north coast. It was about a four-mile walk.

If the track weren't wide enough to take a lorry, they would have trouble getting the stuff out. He saw that at the entrance to the valley there was a farm called Cala Boquer and beyond it, almost at the end of the valley and not far from the ship, another house marked, but unnamed, on the map. The track went as far as the house and he thought it was a good bet that it would carry lorries. He decided to explore. He had plenty of time and he felt he could use it to sort some of his thoughts out.

Even so, he gave Kate the chance to come with him. But she said, " No, Nick. You go by yourself. I shall be all right here."

The track rose to Cala Boquer, skirted the edge of an unkempt garden, and then died in a wide farm courtyard. A couple of women were pounding at their washing on the edge of a stone trough. They stared at him but said nothing. One of them was good-looking and young. As she turned and watched him cross the yard, the water dripping from her wet hands on to the front of her black apron, he remembered Kate asking him if he had ever wanted another woman when he had been away from her.

What man away from his wife hadn't, he asked himself. Personally, he was damned old-fashioned. If you couldn't say no to yourself the whole thing just degenerated into chaos . . .

A dog came barking out of one of the stable doors. As it circled him he swore and swept his arm at it. Behind him he heard the women laugh.

The track now, although still wide enough for a lorry, went across natural rock with smooth boulders just thrusting through it. It would give the springs of any lorry hell.

Beyond the defile, the valley bed sloped upwards for about two miles, and from his map Thorne saw that from the top of the slope it began to fall away to the sea for another mile. Dark across the skyline he saw the uneven trail of a stone wall.

When he reached it, the track, though it ran on, was barred by a gate. The gate was padlocked and topped with a strand of barbed wire. Wire ran the whole length of the wall. He saw that the wire was new, as were also the chain and padlock on the gate. There was a board to one side of the gate with a notice which read, *Villa Ermano. Propiedad Particular.* The board was new, too.

He stepped back from the gate. He would have to get permission for lorries to use the track. To do that he had to reach the Villa

Ermano. This wouldn't be the first locked gate he'd climbed over.

He was straddled on top of the gate, about to lift his foot over the strand of wire and jump, when from his right came the report of a gun. The spread shot hit the track two or three yards inside the gate and a quick cloud of dust and stone chips billowed into the air.

Thorne jumped back on to his own side of the gate. As he landed he fell. He picked himself up, cursing.

Away to his right he saw that a small bamboo-slatted hut had been built against the wall. Walking from it towards the gate were two people. One of them was a young man and the other a girl. The girl had a shotgun crooked under her arm. With them, ambling along with a false demureness, was a black Alsatian dog. They came leisurely down to the gate and stood there looking at him.

He didn't like the way they were looking at him. Both of them were enjoying it too much. But of the two only the girl was smiling. She wore a yellow cardigan over a white blouse, red canvas trousers and white sandals. The skin of her neck above the open blouse was brown and the sun caught and flashed on the gold chain she wore. Her dark hair was short and untidy and as she stood there she slowly raised a hand and ran her fingers through it.

The movement was full of insolence and it touched Thorne off. "What's the idea?" he demanded angrily. "You damned nearly filled me full of holes."

"I didn't see you," she answered. He had spoken in Spanish, in Catalan, but she used pure Castilian. "There were some quail on the road."

It was cool, too damned cool, and all the time her eyes were going over him and telling him to go to hell.

"There wasn't a quail in sight. And anyway you must have seen me standing on top of the gate."

"There were quail," she said. "Six of them. My eyesight is very good."

"Is it?" Thorne snapped. "Then your shooting is very poor. You didn't get one of them."

She laughed. "It's Guido's gun. I'd forgotten it pulls to the right."

Good-looking, he thought, and insolent, and behind it all the smell of bigger trouble which warned him to keep his temper. The young man was about twenty, thin, with a weak, handsome face. He had the girl's dark hair and Thorne guessed they were brother and sister and much of an age. He could place them both, wilful, arrogant, spoilt by their parents, plenty of money.

"It's locked and I wanted to get by," said Thorne.

"You speak Spanish. Surely you read it?" The girl tipped her head towards the notice.

Holding on to himself, Thorne answered, "How am I supposed to let people at the villa know I want to visit them? Shout?"

"Didn't you read the notice down at Cala Boquer?" said the

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girl. She was looking at him now and smiling still. But the smile had lost its insolence. Her expression was full of curiosity and frankness as though it had suddenly occurred to her that he might be of interest.

"There's no notice down there," he said.

"That's right, Juana," said her brother. "I'd forgotten. They haven't put it up yet."

"And it looks as though this has only just gone up." Thorne pointed to the board. "In Puerto they told me you could walk right up through here." They hadn't but it was worth trying.

"So you could," said the girl. "Until a few days ago." She was still looking at him as though she were making a mental catalogue. No smile now. Just sizing him up, clothes and body. And something told him that she wouldn't make any mistake. She'd price his white linen suit to a peseta and judge his weight within a few pounds. There was no doubt in him that, given a chance, this was a girl he could heartily dislike.

"All right," he conceded. "There were six quail on the road. You didn't see me. And I had no right to climb on the gate. Now let's start again. My name's Thorne and I'd like to make a call at the villa." Guido laughed, but it died quickly as the girl turned and frowned at him.

"You want to call on my uncle at the villa?" she asked.

"I want to see the owner."

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"You can't— My uncle, Señor Casares Manasco, is not there."

"When will he be back?"

"In a month, I think."

"Or maybe two months," added Guido.

Even if they were lying, it was no good losing his temper. He had heard of the wealthy Manasco—and had not much liked what he had heard. These two were enjoying themselves, but they weren't fooling. Yet he felt it more than likely that Señor Manasco was, in fact, in residence.

Thorne pulled out his map. Going closer to the gate, he handed it to the girl. The black Alsatian, resenting his movement, growled unpleasantly.

"Quiet, Eduardo," said the girl. The dog sat back and panted, grinning, all tongue and teeth, at Thorne.

"Perhaps you'd help me," Thorne said. "I really want to get over to this beach called Agua Gelida. As it means passing over this property, isn't there someone who could give me permission in the absence of the owner?"

She took the map and looked at it. Then she shook her head. "There is no one who would dare give such permission in my uncle's absence."

He wasn't annoyed now. This was the game, the old, old game, and he decided to play it.

"Can I get in touch with him? You know where he is?"

"No. He goes off and doesn't say."

"I see." He put on a smile, but not because he was warming to these two. He fished a pencil from his pocket and held it out. "Perhaps you'd be good enough, señorita, to mark on the map the extent of your uncle's property."

She took the pencil and, moving to the wall, put the map on a flat stone. As she bent over it, marking it, her hair fell forward over her forehead. She pushed it away, and the movement was unexpectedly childish . . .

She handed the map back. She had drawn a line across the valley to indicate the stone wall. From each end of the wall a line ran back to the sea following the ridges of the high crags that enclosed the place. But at the sea the line curved in a small semicircle to exclude the Agua Gelida beach.

"In other words," said Thorne as he studied it, "there's no way to approach the beach by land except over your uncle's property?"

"That is so," she said.

"You can reach the Agua Gelida beach by sea, of course. It means going round Cabo de Perada," said Guido.

Thorne folded the map and put it in his pocket.

The young man, Guido, was lighting a cigarette, all his interest apparently gone. But the girl had rested her elbows on the gate, the shotgun crooked between them, and she was rubbing her chin gently on the stock.

"You did say your name was Thorne, didn't you?"

He swung round at the question. " Yes."

" Nicholas Thorne? "

" Yes." And then he added speculatively, " It seems I was expected? "

She nodded. " You were. But I must say, I thought you'd be different." For a moment he was tempted to try to get some explanation from her. Then he decided against it. She wouldn't give anything away. She was just enjoying herself at his expense.

As he began to walk back down the valley he knew that she was still there, watching him . . .

There were two things now. This, and Kate. Watching her, talking mechanically as they had dinner, it was hard to keep his mind clear. All he was conscious of was a sense of sudden complication, and resentment. The two things had dropped out of the blue. Given a free run, it shouldn't have roused more than a working bloody-mindedness and a shrewd decision. Señor Casares Manasco might be stinking rich. But that wouldn't stop him.

Up there, as he faced the girl Juana across the gate, Kate had gone from his mind. But down here, as they moved like a couple of pasteboard figures through dinner, and manœuvred into different positions again for brandy and coffee, the job dropped away and there was only Kate. When he had walked back to the car with her after their talk and he had said, " Don't worry, Kate. We'll be all right," he had meant it. What he hadn't seen then, because everything was crowded on top of him, was that forgiveness was more than a matter of words.

They could have been two people forced to share a hotel table, trapped again in a corner of the lounge over their coffee, and both of them sighing with boredom at the effort of making talk.

She went up to their room before him and he knew she was escaping. Escaping but expecting to be rescued. And that was it. Here was the whole thing, the whole act of forgiveness, stripped of words, fined down to a practical gesture . . . The real truth lay in the body.

When he went up finally, Kate was in bed reading. She'd tied her hair back for the night and her face was free of make-up, shining. In the soft light she looked about fourteen; lost in the large bed, sitting up, and waiting for him. She smiled and her eyes held the brightness of a new shyness that reminded him of their early days . . .

" What is the job up here, Nick? "

" There's a French boat aground at Agua Gelida. Domingo and I have bought the cargo."

" Is it big? Lots of money? " She was putting the clock back. He could hear the brightness in her voice, and it hurt him. She was trying. Let it be right. Let's pretend that nothing has happened. Kate chatting away while he got ready for bed.

" Could be. Or it could bankrupt us."

" Not if you're handling it, darling."

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At any other time he could have enjoyed a grumble about Domingo and the job and taken her encouragement. But the job was miles away now. There was only Kate, waiting for him. And for this moment his experience was a dead loss and his own good sense suspect. He scowled at himself in the mirror.

"How long will it take?"

"I don't know. A month maybe. I can't tell yet."

She was waiting for him, and he knew she was nursing and calming her own anguish. Nothing could help.

I'm as jealous as hell, he cried to himself. A man called Raymond Asherton has slept with my wife. I'm hurt. And if I'm hurt, I'd like to make someone else suffer.

He went to her, still dressed, and sat on the edge of the bed. Her hand came out from the covers and found his. "Nick?"

"There's trouble over this job," he said quickly.

"What kind of trouble?" She half turned towards him and the movement bared her shoulders so that he saw the brownness of her breasts and the faint shadow of the nipples through the silk of her nightdress. He remembered their first night in Barcelona, both of them full of the hungry wantonness of love, neither of them strangers to it, but the past then had been wiped away in the completeness of their possession and submission. But this was now. At the sight of her body, his imagination surged; and, fighting to control it, he began to talk.

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"I've got to go out. I've got to get over to Agua Gelida, and the only way to do it quickly is now . . . to climb down the cliff track in the dark."

As he talked he knew he was a fool, that he should have taken her and held her, buried his face in her breasts and cursed and loved her. He wanted to do it, even now, but he couldn't. He sat there, hearing his voice going calmly over the business details, laying them out for her understanding, when he should have been bruising and crushing her with the angry love in him.

For the two hours before dawn he sat on the dry sand of Agua Gelida beach, his back to a boulder, and waited for daylight. A morning wind was stirring, clearing the sky of cloud. Thirty yards away, the sea broke in a creaming edge of foam and he could just make out the grey bulk of the grounded cargo boat. It was very close inshore. Getting the stuff onto the beach shouldn't be difficult and—once the road was open to him—lorries could come right down to the beach edge. The sooner he saw Señor Casares Manasco the better.

Slowly the dawn light seeped over the hills behind him and filled the bay. The beach was a flattened semicircle about a hundred yards long. It was soft sand, strewn with driftwood and dried lengths of bamboo. Backing it was a small broken cliff with the fresh green of growing bamboos and rushes springing up between the boulders. On the far side of the beach, below a clump of bamboos there was a dark channel across the sand where the fresh-water spring that gave the beach its name worked its way to the sea. A wide gap in the cliff led up to the track to Cala Boquer, but the height of the low cliff cut off all sight of the valley. At the foot of the gap was a shack made of bamboo, packing-cases, and odd lengths of plank, bleached and worn rough by the sea. To the side of the shack was a small rowing-boat and a pile of lobster pots and boxes.

Seaward, the narrowing sides of the valley ran out in lofty, dark cliffs, pinching in at the mouth of the small inlet. The sea was a sombre, restless mauve from the cliff shadows still across it.

The French cargo boat lay about two hundred yards out from the beach and almost broadside on to the left-hand run of cliffs. Between her starboard side and the cliffs was a narrow channel of water about fifty yards wide. She sat there on an even keel, but low in the water, a black, bulky shape with high, flaring bows pointing towards the beach.

Thorne eyed her from the water's edge. From the report on her he knew she was holed low down on the port bow and that the forward and after hatches were partly flooded. She carried a single stack, high and old-fashioned, with two bands of purple and white painted round it. The bridgework was squat and a dirty mustard colour. The name *Maria* was plated to the bows and long, pointed streamers of rust, like stalactites, fanged downwards from each letter. She sat out there, black and rusty, like some gigantic old fish

kettle. How she'd ever come in through the narrow bay entrance and settled herself in here he couldn't think, but no doubt anyone with a knowledge of marine insurance could have found a dozen answers.

He dragged the row-boat down from the shack. There were no oars, but he found a long thin piece of plank from the junk outside and used it over the stern to ferry himself out.

He spent half an hour going over her. She wasn't a big boat, not much more than five hundred tons, a disreputable old hack, worked too long and little money spent on her. The engine-room had a foot of water in it and there was just enough movement on the *Maria* to keep it sloshing to and fro. At some time, he saw, there had been more movement, for great fans and tidemarks of oil marked the bulkheads, and the machinery was covered in a greasy scum. Everything that could be taken had been stripped. Only the cargo in the two holds would be untouched and he saw why. To get at it below decks meant going through water, while above decks, stacks of timber baulks blocked anyone from raising the covers. On the bridge behind the wheelhouse was a small saloon which the captain had used. Somebody had tried to unship the table, which was bolted to the floor, and had given up.

He went forward and sat on one of the wood baulks and lit a cigarette. The sun was warm now. The run of water along the *Maria*'s sides made a gentle, soothing sound. There was no doubt about it. It was the kind of job that, normally, he liked. Peroni had guessed right about that. And there was a profit to be made. But he had the feeling that it was not going to be straightforward. The physical difficulties could be faced . . . yet something about the whole set-up made him uneasy.

Inland, above the low cliff of the beach, he saw the morning breeze run shivering through the tall eucalyptus trees around the Villa Ermano. He had a good view of it from here. A pink wall with a tiled pent to it ran round the seaward side. Terraces with vines, a patch of azaleas, and a flaring red run of tall geraniums, and through them a glimpse of the house and a forecourt. Against the bare backcloth of the mountains the place looked as though it had been dropped there by accident.

An iron gate in the wall opened and he saw Juana come out and begin to walk down towards the beach. She was a small white figure in the distance.

He got into his boat and began to row ashore. It was time he found Mr. Casares Manasco and got things straightened out.

She stood at the top of the cut and watched him pull the boat ashore. He abandoned it halfway up the beach, and walked towards her. He'd been up all night and he felt dirty and in need of a shave. He climbed the rutted slope to the top of the low cliff and she stood, unmoving, in his path.

She had a half-smiling, half-insolent look of appraisal on her face. I could be a prize bull, he thought, and she a judge, ticking

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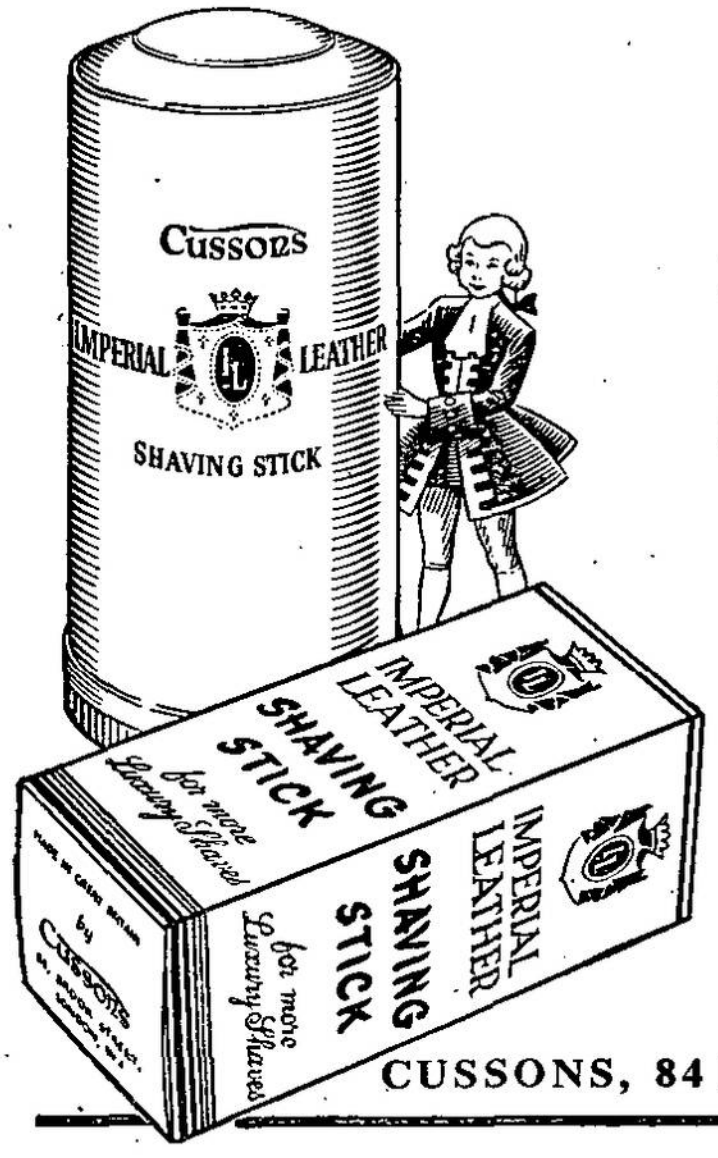

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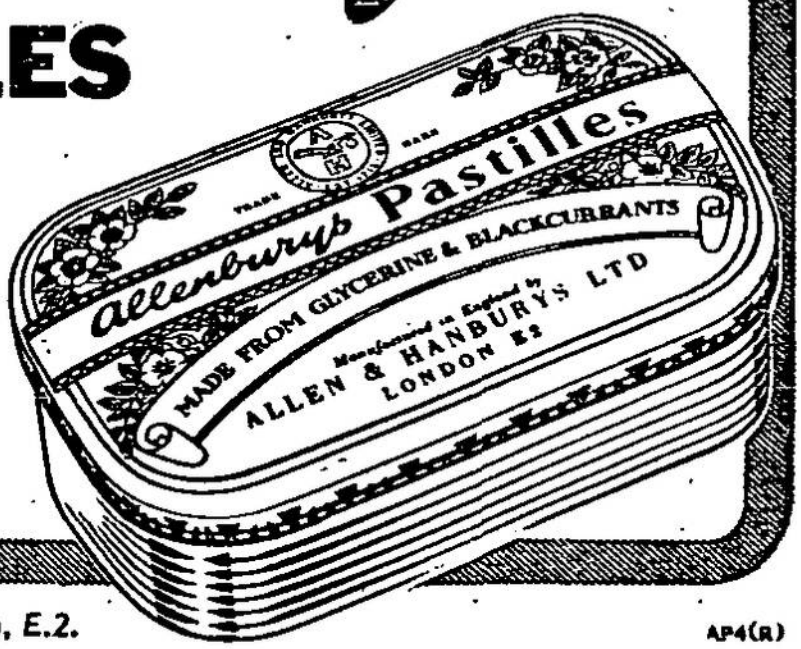

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off my points as I go round the ring. But no matter how he made out he knew he wasn't going to get a first. And because she watched him like that, it made him awkward from the outside right through to the marrow, and the awkwardness did nothing for his temper. She didn't move out of his way and he was damned if he was going to walk round her.

He stopped a yard from her. He saw her look down at the spotless sweep of her white skirt and one hand hovered for a second towards her hair. Thrust into the short curls above her right ear was a single head of pink geranium. He could see her coming down the garden path and picking it off, and it had been put there, not for exotic elegance, but as a child idly picks a flower and thrusts it through a buttonhole.

" You are now," she said arrogantly, " standing on the boundary between the beach and my uncle's land."

" And now "—he stepped forward as he spoke—" I am on your uncle's land."

She held her place but her right hand dropped to the skirt pocket of her dress and she drew out a tiny automatic, so small that he could see only the black mouth of the muzzle like the entrance to a wasp's nest.

" Get off our land! "

He laughed. " What a girl you are. Shotguns, automatics, barbed wire, and a black watchdog. I should think there are times when even your uncle gets tired of you."

" I don't like you," she said coldly. " Get off our land."

He moved up to her side and his face was close to hers and in its dark anger he read signs that he would have been a fool to ignore. One false move and she would fire . . .

He shook his head and walked past her and as he did so he said, " I'm going up to find your uncle. You can shoot me in the back if you must. But he wouldn't approve."

He walked on, not looking back. If she fired it would be at the path close to him; to scare him, to give herself the pleasure of his anger. But no shot came and he went all the way up to the wrought-iron gate in the wall without looking back because he knew she would expect him to look back, to betray some sign of uncertainty.

An iron bell-pull hung at the side of the gate and he tugged at it. Somewhere in the house he heard the harsh jangle of the bell. Then he turned and looked back. She was sitting on the edge of the low cliff, looking out to sea and smoking. Her back was to him.

A short, bald-headed man in a green baize apron and a blue-and-white striped shirt came to the gate.

Thorne handed him his card and said, " I wish to see Señor Casares Manasco."

The man began to say something but he cut him short. " I'd like to see Señor Manasco." He stepped through the gate.

The servant led him round the side of the villa that faced the full blaze of the morning sun down the valley. There was a cane table and two chairs on a tiled terrace. A man sat at the table with

a breakfast tray. The fold marks in its white cloth were knife-sharp. The servant withdrew. The man poured coffee, reached for a cigarette and then, without hurry, looked up at Thorne.

He wore a rough fisherman's shirt and dirty white trousers. His feet, poking beyond the table, were bare and brown and looked as hard and knotted as bruyère roots. A fly couldn't have landed on his face without touching a wrinkle. His hair was a coppery red, dry and lifeless-looking, and cut so short that the pink of the scalp glowed through it. Without a word he lit his cigarette and then pushed up a pair of bifocal spectacles to rest on the bony ridges of his eyebrows. A dry, sapless man who could have been any age from forty to seventy; a small man with pale blue eyes and a hard little trap of a mouth almost lost in his wrinkled skin . . . clearly a man who at this moment hated his guts. The little blue eyes were on him, blinking, going over him, missing nothing.

Thorne said, " Señor Manasco? "

The man nodded.

The black Alsatian walked out from the room behind the terrace, raised its head curiously at Thorne, and then dropped heavily on the sunlit tiles, stretching out in the warmth.

" You make it very difficult for anyone to see you, Señor Manasco."

Manasco wiped his mouth with a napkin and said shortly, " Not everyone—just you, Señor Thorne."

" May I ask why? "

Manasco gave a sharp, intolerant grunt. " You know why. Don't waste my time on that kind of talk."

" But I don't know why. I just want to talk some simple business with you. I almost got a bullet in my back."

" You deserve one." The words were brittle, like the sound of dead leaves stirred by a quick wind.

" Perhaps you're mistaking me for someone else? " Thorne was being patient. He had to be. He wanted something from this man.

Manasco stood up. He was short, but in his movements there was a cocky, bantamlike thrust, full of fight and confidence. " There is no mistake." A small brown hard hand beat at the air impatiently. " I know all about you and your partner, Peroni. Frankly, you're not the kind of man I care to deal with, but just now it is necessary. However, let us make it quick."

Thorne stirred angrily. " I don't like the way you're talking to me, Señor Manasco. You've obviously got something wrong."

Manasco turned his back on him, walked to the edge of the terrace, and began to pick flower heads from a box of geraniums.

" I've got nothing wrong. And I talk to you the way you deserve." He swung round, the stubby fingers of one hand teasing at a flower head. " Now get this clear. You got that cargo out there "—his head tipped stiffly towards the bay—" by a dirty trick. But the thing you didn't know was that you had to come across my land to reach it and to cart it away. Well, you're never

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going to shift it because I won't give permission for my road to be used. Instead—"

"Wait a minute. What dirty trick are you talking about? You've got something pretty badly mixed up here."

For a moment Manasco stared at him, the blue eyes hooded, almost closed, as though he were trying to see in and through Thorne. Then the small mouth opened, snapping, fishlike, and a short, contemptuous sound marked the angry wave of his hand.

"If you don't know, your partner does. But I think you know."

"Are you calling me a liar?" Thorne stepped forward.

Manasco stood his ground but he snapped his fingers and the black Alsatian was on its feet, head lowered.

"There are a lot of things I could call you, but I don't intend to waste more time on you than is necessary. I'm going to teach you and your partner a lesson. You don't get that cargo. I'm going to have it. I'm going to transport it to Palma and sell it to Vargiu and make the profit you and your partner fancied you were going to have."

"You are?"

"Yes. I'll give you two thousand pounds for it. What you paid. My offer stays open exactly three days. After that—if you won't sell—well, then you can go to hell and the cargo can rot out there for ever because you'll never move it."

Thorne was silent. This man was in a rage. Just why, he couldn't guess, but he already had a very shrewd idea that the

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answer might rest with Domingo Peroni. "You don't like my offer?"

Manasco's head came up, his neck was lean, the flesh loose like a turtle's.

Despite the anger and confusion in him, Thorne smiled. Manasco was loving every moment of this. This was his life, to fight, to break and make . . . big business or little business, no one, they said, ever got the better of him.

Thorne shrugged his shoulders. "No, I don't like your offer. If it comes to that, I don't like you, and quite definitely, Señor Manasco, I don't intend to hand over my chance of a nice profit because you've got some bee in your bonnet."

"*Three days.* Just phone my agent—Manuel Rodriguez—in Palma. And in future, Señor Thorne, don't make dirty business deals until you're big enough and ruthless enough—and clever enough—to bring them off."

Thorne was past anger now. The whole thing was out of perspective.

Domingo would have to explain . . .

"You have three days." Manasco moved towards the door of the room behind. "Guido!"

Guido came out onto the terrace. He wore an American shirt decorated with a design of pineapples and palm trees, and he had his hands in the pockets of a pair of white shorts. He looked young and easy and he was smiling.

"Guido, go down and unlock the gate for Señor Thorne." Manasco's voice was abrupt, full of authority. He turned and walked into the house, leaving Thorne standing at the head of the terrace steps. Guido called to the dog and it went down the steps past Thorne.

Thorne joined the procession and the dog dropped back until its nose was almost touching his right hand.

They went in silence down the valley road, their positions unchanged. Guido unlocked the gate and held it open.

Thorne passed through and then paused. Guido stared at him and the skin between his eyebrows puckered giving his handsome face a sullen look.

"What am I supposed to have done? Do you know?"

Guido made no answer. He pushed the gate shut and then began to fasten the padlock. The Alsatian growled menacingly at his heels.

"Do you know, or don't you?" Thorne asked curtly.

"Of course I know!" Guido's head came up and his face was defiant.

"Then tell me."

In silent hostility, they faced one another across the gate.

★ ***The Second Part of Manasco Road, by Victor Canning, appears in next month's Argosy on sale January 10.***

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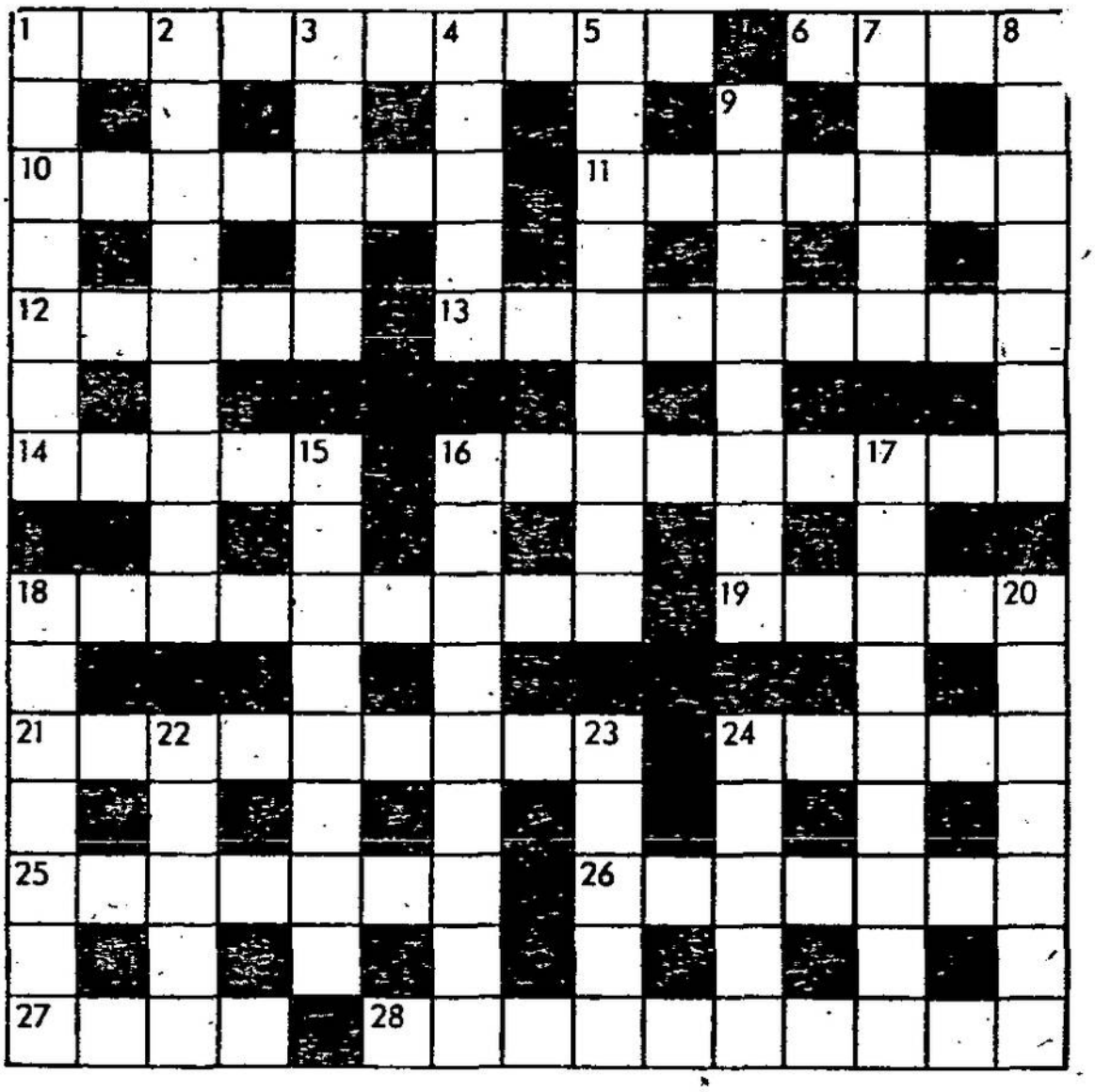

★

Solution on Page 24

★

CLUES

Across

1 Test at the riverside; it's working (10).

6 Fault-finding fish and festive dish (4).

10 It's important to be this, even in play (7).

11 Provoking in the woollen mill (7).

12 Ran? Ay, it's a race (5).

13 Glean tine from sweetbriar (9).

14 You can't —— a 6 across (5).

16 A friend follows the subject currently (9).

18 Worn in May in memory of Charles II (3-6).

19 A twisted sleeve holds Little People (5).

21 The Ancient Mariner shot it with his crossbow (9).

24 I'm in the plot and can show the way (5).

25 Nice, Sid; it's engraved (7).

26 "Cultivate literature upon a little ——" (Sydney Smith) (7).

27 Lohengrin's girl could become a seal (4).

28 Does the pirate get footwear gratis? (10).

Down

1 Country composer (7).

2 Often located at cross-roads (5, 4).

3 Shiny Surrey suburb (5).

4 "The —— primrose that forsaken dies" (Milton) (5).

5 Deer, before bounding away (9).

7 Macavity always had one (5).

8 Not quite jiggery but allied to pokery (7).

9 Christmas goose or a sticky customer (9).

15 Stop me in favouring kinsmen (8).

16 Command that gets a short answer? (4, 5).

17 "Some we loved, the —— and the best" (Omar Khayyam) (9).

18 Give an opinion about little Albert (7).

20 Colonist who pays his bills? (7).

22 A cowboy's needed to sit for this county (5).

23 Notch twenty (5).

24 Dad and a Spanish uncle in the yard (5).

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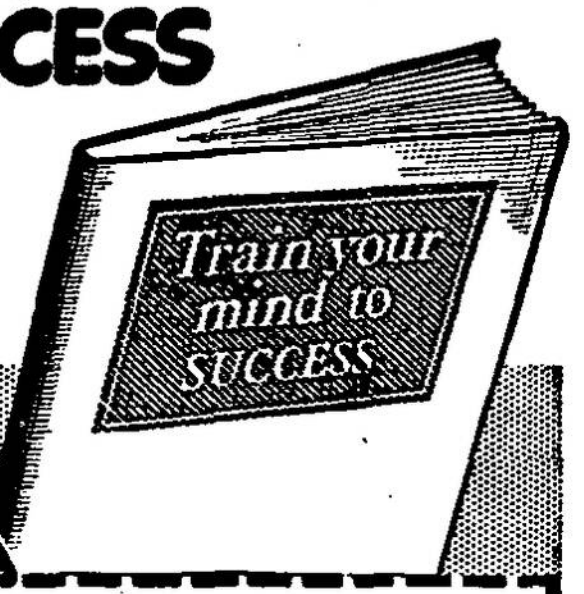

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